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Oppenheim



“She broke off an orchid, and thrust it through his buttonhole.”

Vol. 1.

Kingston

By

W. O. Kingston

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and Company

The Man And His Kingdom

By

E. Phillips Oppenheim

Author of "A Maker of History," "The Master Mummer,"

"A Prince of Sinners," "Mysterious Mr. Sabin,"

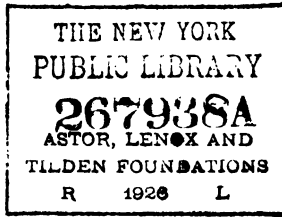
"Anna the Adventuress," etc.

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THE MAN AND HIS KINGDOM

CHAPTER I

FELLOW-TRAVELLERS

"THIS is," he remarked cheerfully, "our last morning."

"I suppose so," she answered, without enthusiasm.

"In a few hours," he continued, "you will be receiving your first impressions of your new home. I think I understood you to say, Miss Denison, that you were going to live, for some time at any rate, in San Martina?"

She assented, but without raising her eyes, and with certain indications of uneasiness.

"It is probable," she said. "My plans are very unsettled, however. It will depend largely upon—upon——"

He waited patiently, but she did not conclude her sentence. Throughout that long voyage from England he had noticed on her part a marked and singular avoidance of any discussion as to her destination or future.

Until this last hour he had respected her obvious wishes—he had, indeed, very little curiosity in his nature, and her avoidance of the subject was quite sufficient for him. But latterly another idea had occurred to him. San Martina was the last place in the world likely to attract chance visitors or tourists; it was also one of the least suitable spots on earth for a woman to find herself in, alone and unprotected. Had she by any chance been deceived in her reports of the place?

“I wonder,” he said, “if you understand the sort of country you are going to—what you will think of the life.”

The sun was very hot, even under their awning. Yet she shivered as she answered him, and he caught a strange gleam in her eyes which he had noticed there once before when some reference had been made to their journey's end.

“If you do not mind,” she answered slowly, “I would rather not think about it. I would rather talk about something else.”

The man's face was clouded. Yet he turned towards her with a certain air of resolution.

“Every day throughout this long voyage,” he said, “you have avoided all mention of the future. You have talked as though the day of our arrival at San Martina was the natural end of all intercourse between us.”

“That is—what it must be,” she murmured.

He smiled indulgently.

“That,” he said, “is impossible. It is a proof to me that you know nothing of San Martina. It calls itself a city—it ranks as a state. Yet it contains only eight

thousand inhabitants, and there are not half a dozen European families there. Now, how can you expect that we shall not meet in such a place as this. We——”

She stopped him with a little gesture.

“You do not understand,” she said. “It is impossible for me to make you understand.”

“Perhaps,” he said, after a moment’s hesitation, “I am not quite so much in the dark as you imagine. You may remember that on the first day of our voyage I picked up a letter which you had dropped, and restored it to you.”

She gave a little gasp. He could see the colour slowly fading from her cheeks.

“You—you did not read it?” she faltered.

“I need not tell you that I did not,” he answered. “But curiously enough as I stooped to pick it up I saw my own name on the open page. Of course I looked at it for a moment. The sentence in which my own name occurred stared me in the face. That was all I saw. But it struck me as being curious.”

“Tell me,” she begged, “exactly what you read.”

“I think that this was the sentence,” he continued. “‘If by any evil chance Gregory Dene is your fellow-passenger,—remember.’ That is every word I saw, but you will admit that it read oddly to me.”

“You read no more—no more than that?”

“I pledge you my word,” he answered gravely. “If I could have seen less, I would.”

She sat quite still for several moments with half-closed eyes. Gregory Dene began to feel a little uncomfortable.

"At any rate," he said, "we have had a pleasant voyage. It has been something to remember."

"It has been something—to remember—always," she murmured.

"I had hoped," he continued, "that our friendship would become a permanent thing—that you would allow me to visit you when we landed."

She opened her eyes and fixed them upon him. He felt that he had never before understood how beautiful grey eyes may be.

"In a few hours," she said, "this voyage comes to an end. With it our friendship—if you will call it so—also terminates."

"You mean that—seriously?"

"I mean it."

"Of your own will?"

She paused for a moment. Then she answered him.

"Of necessity."

Gregory Dene rose slowly to his feet and walked away to the rail of the little steamer. For some little time he remained with his back to her, thinking. The thing was so incomprehensible that the more he thought the more bewildered he became. It was one of the furthestmost corners of the world for which he was bound, a tiny little Republic without history or any possible attraction for travellers or chance visitors. The girl who had been his fellow-traveller from England had not mentioned her destination to him until they had left the great Ocean Liner at Buenos Ayres, only to meet again on the little tramp steamer in which they were completing their journey. His

surprise at seeing her had been great. Of all places in the world San Martina was one of the most impossible for a woman of her age and looks, to arrive at alone and without powerful friends. Had she been deceived in any way—misled? Her voice broke in upon his wonderings.

“Mr. Dene.”

He stooped once more beneath the shabby little stretch of awning, and returned to her side. There was a slight nervous flush on her cheeks. Her soft eyes sought his appealingly.

“Won’t you be reasonable, please?” she begged. “Don’t spoil the memory of these last six weeks. They will always remain to me the pleasantest part of my life—to look back upon. I am a very unhappy and a very unfortunate woman. You will not add to my troubles, will you?”

“God forbid,” he answered fervently. “Indeed, I am very foolish, perhaps you may think impertinent, to ask you so many questions. Only I sincerely trust that you know the sort of place you are going to.”

She shuddered a little.

“My voyage,” she said, “is not one of pleasure.”

“At least,” he remarked, “we must meet.”

“That will be,” she said softly, “as fate directs. Who can tell what is in store for us?”

He strolled away with a shrug of the shoulders, and a sensation of annoyance. She was altogether too sentimental and enigmatic. He was not in the least in love with her—he was only a little disturbed by the fear lest she might in some way have been deceived as to the nature of the life which lay before her. He had done his best to warn her.

The rest was no matter of his. There was a mystery about her journey and her destination in which he himself, according to that letter which he had picked up, seemed to figure in some hidden and mysterious way. Whatever it was, a few days must make it all clear. Till then he could leave it.

He climbed the steps on to the bridge and entered into conversation with the fat little Portuguese captain, who was clad in a white linen suit, and who held above his perspiring head a green umbrella. He had relinquished the care of his ship to the pilot who stood by his side. Already they were drawing very close to the harbour of San Martina. The captain was disposed for conversation, and accepted Dene's cigar with a florid little outburst of thanks.

"The voyage?—yes, it had seemed long to Senor Dene, no doubt. Four days and three nights—yes, it was tedious without doubt after the sixteen knots of the great English steamer which had brought them from Liverpool. But, after all, was it a matter for wonder? San Martina was but a hole, a veritable hole—a home for dogs, no more. Few people indeed went there save dealers in horses and grain, and they for the most part were half-breeds, and far from being desirable companions for one holding"—the little man drew himself up—"an official position. It was many voyages since he had carried an Englishman, certainly never before an Englishwoman so young and so beautiful as the Senorita. Without doubt, the Senor knew her destination and the object of her visit to San Martina. She would be going, of course, to the President's—whose house else was fit to receive her?" The little

man's black bead-like eyes were twinkling with curiosity, but Dene's amiability had vanished. He answered curtly, and turned upon his heel. He walked down the deck of the narrow evil-smelling little steamer, and stood once more before the girl.

She had not moved. The book had fallen from her lap, and her eyes were fixed steadily seaward. Dene noticed that she had chosen the side of the steamer remote from the shore which they were nearing, and that she kept her face always turned along the ocean path by which they had come. She moved a few of her belongings from his empty chair by her side, and looked up at him with a ghost of a smile upon her lips.

"Come," she said, "we have an hour or two longer. Talk to me. I want to escape from my thoughts. Tell me once more of this strange colony of yours. Let us talk of Beau Desir."

He saw that she was on the point of a nervous breakdown, and perhaps for the first time he appreciated the tragedy of her pale, terror-stricken face. He was ashamed of certain half-formed suspicions which had crept into his mind, and sitting down by her side they fell easily enough into one of their long talks. It was a subject which she seemed never weary of discussing with him. In the little state of San Martina, a day's ride from the city, was a colony of his own founding, consisting chiefly of men who in more thickly populated countries had found the struggles of life too great for them. There were men and women there whom he had rescued from starvation, from despair, even from crime. In the valley of Beau Desir they had started life

afresh. There was the land, fruitful and virgin soil most of it, and their labour. He had brought them to it, supplied the machinery, and there all suggestions of charity ended. From the very first, the scheme had proved successful. They were easily able to raise from the land more than enough for their own subsistence. The profits of the great horse ranche which was Dene's especial hobby sufficed for all their extraneous needs. Dene had been to England to buy more machinery and stock, and to fetch money to purchase the valley outright from the Republic.

The increasing noise on deck broke in upon their conversation. They were in the bay of San Martina, and rapidly nearing the dock. Then Dene made his last effort.

"It is the end of our journey, Miss Denison," he said quietly. "I am not going to ask you any more questions. I do not wish to say anything likely to give you pain, but I cannot let you go without asking you to remember one thing. You are coming as a stranger to a wild, unformed country where I am afraid you will find what we are used to reckon as civilisation an unknown quantity. I do not know what connections you may have here, but I want you to remember that at any time a single word or message will bring you a friend."

He held out his hand. She looked into his face with streaming eyes.

"Thank you," she said. "I will remember."

Then she hurried from him with a strange look of pain in her face and disappeared down the companion way. Dene looked after her with a puzzled expression. The situation was altogether beyond him. Ternissa Denison

he had recognised during the first few hours of their acquaintance as belonging outwardly at least to one of the best types of English womanhood. She was young, certainly not more than twenty-five, obviously well-bred, and without the shadow of a doubt belonging to the same little world as Dene himself, before he had shaken himself free from the environment of social life. She was dressed always with the spotless and tasteful simplicity of her class, her deportment throughout the voyage had been irreproachable. From the first they had been friends. They had been neighbours at the captain's table. Their after-dinner walks and moonlight *tête-à-têtes* on deck had been accepted by their fellow-voyagers as a natural and reasonable thing. Once or twice they had certainly come very near to a flirtation. Perhaps it was only Dene's inexperience—for, as a rule, women were outside his scheme of life—which had kept them from embarking upon something of the sort. Yet every little action and speech had clearly denoted that fastidiousness of mind and person which is the one irradicable trait of the best of her sex. She was a well-bred, a charming, and a beautiful young woman. All these things made her present position the more extraordinary. She was travelling alone to an out-of-the-way little State where there was not a single English family, where law and order were certainly conspicuous by their absence, and where morals were distinctly upon the *laissez faire* order. Not only this, but as they approached their destination she showed every symptom of unhappiness and nervous strain. She firmly but tearfully refused to answer his questions, however delicately put, and she had a correspondent in

San Martina who regarded the fact of his being her fellow-traveller as an "evil chance." No wonder Dene was bewildered.

He walked away presently to the other side of the steamer, and looked out upon the town which was now well in sight. The quay was crowded as usual with a motley throng of half-breeds, natives, and planters in their white clothes and huge broad hats. Behind was the little amphitheatre of wooden houses, painted green and white, dotted irregularly about upon the hillside, and in the centre of the place the more solid buildings, square and white, with flat roofs and sunblinds. In the background were the towering mountains of the Andiguan range, between which and the town stretched the valley of Beau Desir.

As they slowly backed against the quay, and the bridge was thrown over and made fast, a young man passed on to the steamer before whom every one gave way with servility if not with deference. He was dressed in military uniform, a long blue coat, and white trousers tucked into riding-boots. He was undersized, he wore a small black moustache curled upwards, his eyes were black and his complexion dusky. He came face to face with Dene, whose presence seemed to cause him some uneasiness.

"Back again, Senor Dene," he said, with an attempt at suaveness. "I shall have the pleasure of seeing you at the Presidency. For the present, will you excuse me? Out of the way, you rascal," he added, kicking a sailor who had momentarily impeded his progress, and hastening on across the gangway.

Dene looked after him in surprise. Then he saw a sight

which for a moment deprived him of his self-possession. Ternissa Denison was standing on the deck as white as a ghost, her lips parted in the feeblest and most tremulous of smiles, and Rimarez, with outstretched hands, was welcoming her with all the warmth and volubility which seemed to belong to the man—the heritage of his French descent. Dene turned away with a savage imprecation upon his lips. This was worse even than anything which he had feared.

CHAPTER II

A DEAL WITH THE REPUBLIC

THE President of the Republic of San Martina paused for a moment with the pen in his fingers. At his right hand stood Colonel Juan Sanarez, second in command of the army and a man of note in San Martina. On his other side was Senor Mopez, secretary and general adviser to the President himself, and the principal attorney of his dominion. In a chair on the opposite side of the table was Dene.

"Before I sign this deed, Senor Dene," the President said, laying down his pen and taking the long black cigar from his mouth, "there is a clause which, if it be acceptable to you, I should desire to add. Mine is a small dominion. My army, brave and well-disciplined though it certainly is, numbers but a few hundreds. The population of San Martina has in it many troublesome elements ; it is necessary to keep always a firm hand over them."

Dene, who a few months ago had seen a policeman hung from a lamp-post to commemorate a Saint's day, felt himself able to agree with the President so far. He signified the same gravely and waited for more.

"Now by this deed," the President continued, tapping it with a plump forefinger, "I yield to you on lease for nine hundred and ninety-nine years the valley of Beau Desir. It is very well. Now you have there already dependents of yours over two hundred, English most of them I believe. Their numbers will increase. You will become a power in my country. Is it not so, Senor?"

"It is more than likely," Dene answered, comparing for a moment in his mind the heterogeneous mob who thronged the streets of San Martina with the sturdy hard-working band of men who were making fertile the valley of Beau Desir.

"To-day," the President continued, "San Martina is at peace and free from dissensions owing to our judicious arrest and imprisonment of the most troublesome miscreant who ever cursed an unfortunate country by making it his place of residence. But, how long will this continue? Who can say?"

"Who can say?" echoed Sanarez.

"Who, indeed, can say?" repeated Mopez gloomily.

"If I did my duty," the President declared solemnly, "I should have that man shot. But I am too merciful. Is it not so, my friends? I am too merciful. I shrink from taking human life."

Sanarez and Mopez exchanged glances, and a covert smile lurked for a moment on the lips of both of them. They knew very well that if President Rimarez dared, he would order this traitor to be shot that very instant without hesitation, and with a light heart—that he was even now engaged in completing arrangements for his secret assassina-

tion. But the ways of small Republics in the southern hemisphere are peculiar, and they held their peace.

"No," President Rimarez continued with a sigh, "it is a weakness, Senor, for which I trust you will not despise me, but I cannot bring myself to sign this man's death-warrant. At the same time, he has stirred up a troublesome spirit amongst my people, closely though he is confined. Whilst he lives, he is a source of secret danger to the Republic. A rising is not probable, but as time goes on, who can say? One must be prepared. The clause, Senor, which I propose to add to our agreement is simply this, that in the event of any insurrection in my dominion you engage yourself to bear arms for the government who grants you this charter."

Dene moved uneasily in his chair, and looked thoughtful. The prospect opened up by the President's words, carefully guarded though they had been, was not a pleasant one. He spoke slowly and thoughtfully.

"This comes rather as a surprise to me, President," he said. "My men are men of peace, farm labourers and artisans most of them. I doubt whether one in twenty of them can even handle a revolver."

The President smiled indulgently.

"They are mostly English," he said, "and Englishmen with their fists alone are a match for most of these low half-breeds with their shoddy weapons. Do not let that concern you. If there should be an insurrection it would be an insurrection of ill-armed cowards whom my few brave soldiers would scatter like chaff. Yet it is well to make provision. Some such clause as this should, I think, be inserted."

Dene remained silent.

"I must admit," he said, after a lengthy pause, "that this opens up to me a fresh view of the matter before us. If civil war is a possibility here, am I wise to invest so much money in land whose crops and cattle might be liable to destruction at any moment by a raid on the part of the rebels? To tell you the truth, I had fancied that your state was too small for any trouble of this sort."

A shade of anxiety crossed the President's face. He stole a glance at the great pile of bills which lay between them on the table. The Republic, and particularly its President, was in urgent need of funds—this money was like a godsend. An uncomfortable sensation chilled him at the bare idea of any hitch in the negotiations.

"Civil war," he said slowly, "is possible anywhere. At the same time, I do not wish to give you a false impression. I say it is possible anywhere, but I think I may add that I could think of no spot in Central or South America where it is so unlikely to occur as here."

The Colonel and the Secretary exchanged glances of admiration. Truly President Rimarez was a great man. Their morning had been pleasantly spent in trying and shooting two of the secret agents of the popular party in San Martina, and the disclosures which they had elicited by means not altogether in vogue amongst civilised nations, had greatly increased the President's desire to obtain possession of this very useful sum of money.

"Then why insert it at all?" Dene asked.

The President shrugged his shoulders.

"In a document of this nature," he said, tapping with his

forefinger the sheets of folded paper, "many contingencies have to be provided for, which are, to say the least of it, very unlikely to occur. I look upon civil war, under our present administration, as about as improbable as an earthquake. Yet, as our friend Senor Mopez will tell us, some mention of such an event is legally a necessity. But come, we shall not quarrel. Bah! the idea is absurd. This suggestion is not welcome to you? Very good. I will amend it. We will insert a clause by which you guarantee to supply with neither food or shelter, arms or men any person or persons engaged in rebellion against or outlawed from the State of San Martina. This you cannot object to, for you take the oath of allegiance to the Republic and to myself as President when you take possession of Beau Desir."

"That," Dene said, "I agree to. But I will be frank with you. The mere suggestion of war here has made me a little uneasy. It is most distasteful to me. Now, I shall ask you to insert some such clause as this—that in the event of any of the possessions, crops, machinery or domiciles of myself or any of my people being destroyed or damaged by any insurrection in San Martina, that we are at liberty to claim compensation from the Government."

The President and his two advisers exchanged rapid glances. The same thought was in the minds of each of them. A claim for compensation in their courts would be rather a joke. The ghost of a smile flickered upon the lips of the Secretary. They conferred for a moment in whispers. Then the President turned round and gravely announced that they had decided to waive their natural objections to such a clause.

"We have given you, Senor Dene," the President said, "a very favourable charter because we believe in you and your system, and because we know that where Englishmen are, prosperity follows. We are now agreed."

He dipped his pen in the ink, and with a magnificent splutter wrote his name with many flourishes across the great red seal. Dene followed his example. The notary took the pile of bills to another table, and carefully counted them.

"You have made, Senor Dene," the President said, leaning back in his chair and lighting a fresh cigar, "a very excellent bargain. I will not conceal it from you that we have yielded to your wishes on many points, because your money comes to us at a time when it can very profitably be made use of."

"In the extension of our new system of schools," the notary put in quietly, glancing up from his task.

"Precisely," the President remarked, thinking of that little French schooner laden with rifles and revolvers which lay in the bay waiting for the money before she would consent to land her cargo.

"We are anxious," he continued, "to establish a scheme of free education throughout San Martina on a broad and sound basis."

"A very excellent thing," said Dene, rising and thrusting the charter into his pocket.

The President laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"You must come with me," he said, "and be presented to my wife and daughter. They await us now. In your honour they have, I believe, prepared your national refreshment; afternoon tea—is it not—you call it?"

Dene expressed his delight, and the President took his arm. They left the room together.

Colonel Sanarez and the Secretary exchanged glances as soon as they found themselves alone.

"What an imbecile!" exclaimed the former.

"It is the folly of his thick-skulled nation," agreed the Secretary.

"The money is all right, is it not?" the Colonel asked eagerly.

The other nodded.

"Yes—except that I wish it had been all in bills. The draft here we must send to Buenos Ayres. It cannot be paid into the National Bank."

"And why not?" demanded the Colonel.

Mopez smiled.

"Unfortunately, as our most distinguished President remarked, the finances of San Martina are scarcely in that condition which one would expect in so admirably governed a State. The National Bank have refused to honour our bonds, and the Manager is at this moment hiding in the cellar and expecting to be hauled out and shot. As a matter of fact, the Republic of San Martina is to-day without a banking account."

"I will tell you," the Colonel said, "how we can dispose of the draft. We can pay it to the Frenchman for that cargo of arms."

"It would be," the notary said thoughtfully, "a scandalous waste of public money to pay cash for the whole shipment."

"He will never leave them without," the Colonel replied

gloomily. "He is a person without breeding or any sense of delicacy. We sent a boat this morning for a hundred rifles, with an order signed by the Government, and he refused—positively refused to send them."

"Miscreant."

"He was worse. He sent back a message which was an insult. He said the money with the order, or no rifles. He had been here before. The rascal!"

The Secretary smiled softly.

"We must see, my friend," he said, "whether it may not be possible for us to give him a lesson in manners. Meanwhile, a cigarette."

CHAPTER III

THE PRESIDENT AT HOME

"IT was by a chance, my child, the veriest chance, that your father discovered it," the Senora Rimarez explained, folding her plump little hands together in ecstasy. "But it is as I say. He is noble, rich, and eccentric. You are indeed fortunate, my Lucia. It is a gift from the Saints to you."

The girl who was lounging on the broad piazza by her mother's side looked languidly up. She had the big black eyes and hair of the Senora, but otherwise there was little likeness between them. The President's wife was plump, short, and possessed an amiable air of contentment. Lucia was tall and slim, almost to frailty, her complexion and features were perfect, but her dark eyebrows were contracted in a perpetual frown. She was handsome, but morose.

"A gift," she exclaimed scornfully. "Why, as yet I have not even seen the man, and I am very sure that I do not want to. He must be a fool to come and live in a country like this, and I detest fools."

The Senora smiled placidly.

"As for that, my child," she said, "he is an Englishman,

and all Englishmen are fools until they are married, and then they are what their wives choose to make of them. What was it that you said—‘that as yet he had not looked at you’? Bah! The poor man, he has not had the chance. This afternoon he will be here. He will see you as you are now. Who is there in this little country to compare with you? Bah! We know! There is no one. Are you not, too, the daughter of the President? You will look at him, and he will be your slave. Come, I foretell it. We shall see. Oh, we shall see.”

The Senora nodded her head vigorously, and used her fan. Lucia yawned and leaned back in her chair with half-closed eyes.

“Englishmen,” the Senora continued, “are not, it is true, the most charming of lovers, but as husbands—oh! they are excellent. Do I not know, for have I not met many of them in the old days at Paris? You were right, my dear Lucia, to have nothing to do with that bold young Senor Sagasta. Alas! I fear that he was a bad friend for Eugene. But all Englishmen are not like that. This Sagasta, he was nobody. He is where he deserves to be. But the Senor Dene, he is different. He is noble, he is rich, he is the fitting husband for you.”

Lucia lifted her great eyes, and looked steadily across the gardens below towards a great stone building a mile or more away. It was the prison of San Martina. She looked at it for several moments steadily, and then she sighed. Her face grew softer.

“In a moment or two,” the Senora continued, a note of excitement creeping into her complacent voice, “he will be

here. You are adorable to-day, my Lucia, in that white gown, but you will look more amiable, will you not? He will be shy, this Englishman—all big Englishmen are shy—and if you look at him like that he will forget that your eyes are beautiful, he will be frightened. You must smile, my Lucia. You smile too seldom.”

The girl gave vent to a little exclamation of contempt.

“How can one smile who lives here, I wonder,” she cried. “Oh, with you it is different, I know. You can sit and fan yourself and drink lemonade with that old Mopez woman for ever. For you it is life sufficient. For me it is slavery. I hate it.”

A shade of genuine astonishment passed across the elder woman’s plump good-natured features.

“But, Lucia,” she said, “what would you have? You are a child. You have not yet a husband. When that is settled—well, your liberty will come then. You will do what you choose. Why are you impatient? You are very young. All your life is before you.”

The girl looked steadily away. Her face was black as night, but she made no answer. What was the use? One might as well seek to effect by speech an opening in those thick stone walls as make this fat, contented little woman understand. So she remained silent, only she wondered, as she sat there listening to the murmuring of insects in the garden below and the far-off clamour of tongues in the Plaza, whether indeed the day of her release would ever come—whether she would ever really be able to step out from her enervating environment and take her life into her own hands. She sighed, and then she turned round with a

frown as the sound of voices in the room beyond announced the arrival of the visitor for whose sake she had been bidden to wear that newest and most "chic" of her white muslin gowns, whom she had been told, if not in words at least with nods and veiled hints, that it was her business to captivate.

She looked at him with a certain half-sullen curiosity, as he stepped out on to the broad piazza by her father's side. Dene, if he was not, judged by the usual standards, a good-looking man, was at least a man whom it was good to look upon. He was tall and fair and grave, with wonderfully broad shoulders, well-shaped features and clear grey eyes. His riding suit was plainly made, but it was cut by one of the best English tailors, and he had always that peculiar neatness and freshness of appearance which goes to the making of a well-groomed man. He carried himself with distinction, and his face, fortunately for him, showed not the least appearance of interest at the introduction which her father was making.

"The Senor Gregory Dene, my dear," he said, "wishes to renew the acquaintance which he formed with you here at a previous visit. I have also the honour, Senor Dene, to present you to my daughter, who was, I believe, away on the previous occasion when you favoured us with a call."

Dene shook hands with the President's wife, and bowed quietly to Lucia, who was looking at him languidly with her great black eyes half closed. He accepted the chair to which the President courteously motioned him, and made some remark as to the beauty of the garden which stretched away below. The Senora, who understood flowers and

flowers only outside the culinary art, engaged him at once in a horticultural conversation. Lucia, without even the pretence of apparent interest, yawned and picked up her book.

But the Senora was too good a mother to be carried away even by the pleasure of discussing this her chief interest in life with a stranger who certainly knew something about orchids. She watched for her opportunity and grasped it.

"So it is possible that you who have seen so much, you have really never seen a green carmenita?" she exclaimed with animation. "Ah well, to-day you shall see such a specimen as there is not in the whole of Europe. Lucia, my dear, I want you to take Senor Dene into the orchid garden. You know exactly where the green carmenita is. It is only a few steps, Senor Dene."

Dene glanced towards the girl, and rose to his feet. She looked up from her book, but kept her finger in the place.

"What is it that you wish me to show Senor Dene, mother?" she asked.

"The green carmenita, my love. You know where it is."

Lucia laid down her book, but she did not rise at once.

"It is a small green flower, Senor Dene, whose only distinction is a most appalling ugliness. Is it worth braving this terrible heat for?" she asked.

In his heart he did not think so, but he wished to be polite, and the girl's indolence amused him.

"It seems too bad to disturb you," he said, "but you must remember that I am a mild enthusiast, and a green

carmenita is a very wonderful thing. Perhaps if you are tired one of the gardeners could show it to me."

The Senora made a sign at her daughter, and waved them away.

"It is folly," she declared. "The heat is little and the distance is nothing. Besides, they are so seldom in flower. Lucia, my love, see that the sun does not reach your head. Senor Dene, when you return I shall give you an English cup of tea."

Lucia rose slowly, and opening a parasol of white lace, pushed aside the mosquito netting and swept down the broad steps. Then, as though repenting an abruptness which bordered upon discourtesy, she turned suddenly round and addressed him.

"It is only a few yards, Senor Dene. Will you come this way."

He followed her across a brown burnt lawn and into a winding shrubbery. He had already decided that she was a particularly sulky and disagreeable young woman, and having no desire to make himself agreeable he did not attempt to start a conversation.

They remained silent until they reached a little opening, in the centre of which was another lawn and a brilliant little bed of flowers. Here she paused.

"That," she said, pointing downwards with her parasol towards a little cluster of blossoms in the centre of the bed, "is the green carmenita."

CHAPTER IV

THE GREEN CARMENITA

DENE looked gravely down at a particularly insignificant specimen of a rare but unlovely orchid, and then some impulse prompted him to glance quickly into Lucia's face. Her eyes were slightly contracted, the shadow of a smile was twitching at the corners of her lips. His own sense of humour was swiftly aroused. He laughed outright, and, to his surprise, she joined in.

"How shocking!" she remarked, a moment later. "After all, then, you are not an enthusiast!"

"On the contrary," he assured her, "I dislike orchids."

She lowered her parasol and glanced, doubtless by accident, towards a wooden seat which encircled a gigantic tropical shrub.

"You have brought me out," she said demurely, "under false pretences. And I was so comfortable."

"Your trees at least are magnificent," he said. "May we not sit down for a few moments? It seems cooler to me out here than on the piazza."

"Just as you like," she answered, with a touch of her old ungraciousness. "This is the coolest part of the garden."

They moved slowly towards the seat and sat down. Her manner showed no signs of relaxation; the smile, after all, seemed to have been merely an interlude. She relapsed for a moment or two into cold silence. Then, as Dene ventured upon some conventional remark, she brushed it away and turned to him abruptly.

"Will you tell me," she said, "about your people at Beau Desir? I have heard so many strange things, and I want to know the truth."

He smiled.

"I will tell you all about them, with pleasure," he said, "if you are sure that it will interest you."

She twirled her parasol for a moment and then looked from the clear blue sky into his face.

"It may," she said. "It probably will. I have only met one man yet in all my life who thought about anything but his own pleasure. They say that you are rich and yet that you are a worker, that you live simply and study the welfare of other people. It sounds like a fairy tale. I should like to know why you do it—why you consider it worth while to think of anything else but yourself."

"That sounds," he said gravely, "a little cynical."

"Oh, I am purely a negative quantity," she said. "I have no individuality—it is a luxury which is denied me. I am not allowed to live for myself at all. My ideas are only echoes. You must not consider me as a responsible person. Only I should like to hear."

"And where," he asked, having made up his mind to humour her, "am I to begin?"

"At the very beginning, if you please," she answered.

"If we are interrupted before you have finished you can tell me the rest another time."

He smiled.

"I am afraid that as a story it is not very interesting," he said, "but I will tell you all about it with pleasure. It is nearly five years ago when I first made up my mind to attempt something of this sort. A friend of mine took me one night to a meeting of working men somewhere in London. I think it was the first time I had ever heard our social conditions discussed from their point of view, and I was interested. Although they did not know it at the time, I was one of those against whom they were most bitter. I was a capitalist, and my money came to me from my father, who was one of the largest employers of labour in England. Well, what I heard made a great impression upon me from the first. I saw that there was truth in it. Of course they suffered, as the cause of socialism always has suffered, from exaggeration and indiscretions on the part of their leaders, but it took me a very short time to see that at the root of the matter they had right and justice on their side. I wanted to help them, but at first I was doubtful what course to take. I allowed myself to be persuaded to go in to Parliament as a Radical, and the representative of a working men's constituency. Well, I soon had enough of that. I came to the conclusion that if I could have kept my seat and lived to be a hundred, I should have made very little real progress."

"You called yourself a Socialist, then?" she remarked.

"The term is so ill-defined," he answered. "I came at least to belong to a party of men who think that the

religion of life consists rather in the brotherhood of man than in the worship of an unknown God. Of course, we realise that mankind, as a whole, must live out their lives in the place and order in which they are born, but our doctrine is that the strong should help the weak, the rich the poor. Where this religion is neglected very great misery results. Starvation and great wealth were never meant to flourish side by side. That is what we think it our duty to try and modify. We want every one to have a chance for development. I wonder if you can understand what I mean?"

"Perfectly," she said. "It is very simple and very interesting. Go on, please."

"Well," he continued, "it is one thing to have theories, of course, and another to find the proper means of putting them into practice. I tried Parliament, as I told you, and I used to write a little and speak a little, but I could not persuade myself that a single man or woman was appreciably the better for the trifle I was able to do. Well, I got impatient at last, and I altered my tactics. I left off trying to aid great changes by theorising, and determined to do a little practical and personal good. I had got to know a great many of my constituents personally, and I was able to collect easily a hundred or so who for various reasons were going under in the struggle for life. I brought them out here to the Valley of Beau Desir, which I have just purchased from your father. There I have established a sort of little colony. We grow corn and breed horses, and the profits are divided amongst all in a fair proportion. The men enjoy the dignity of earning their living healthily

and without humiliation, and the women, of course, share in their prosperity. They have no sense of injustice to make fanatics of them—they have every opportunity of living out their lives fully, and, so far as possible, every one does that for which he is best fitted. Of course it is a very small thing really to help a few hundreds when millions are suffering—yet I was weary of generalities, of seeing the same tired faces day by day, and so little result from all our work. I have at least made a tangible start, if it is only in a very small way.”

He glanced towards her tentatively. He scarcely expected to find her interested. What he saw in her face surprised him.

“You are a very fortunate man,” she said. “You have opportunities.”

“Every one has opportunities,” he answered. “It is the desire and the energy which is generally lacking.”

She shook her head. The old sullen gloom was upon her.

“It is not so,” she said coldly. “Every one has not the opportunity. The inequalities in this way are quite as bad as the inequalities of wealth and fortune.”

“I cannot agree with you,” Dene declared. “I believe that every single person in the world has the opportunity of shaping their life towards some practical and good purpose if they desire it.”

“Such a speech, Senor,” she answered bitterly, “shows only how limited is your experience.”

“I am always willing to enlarge it,” he answered. “Do I understand that you disagree with me?”

"Disagree?" She shrugged her shoulders and looked at him scornfully. "Why not? Am I not myself a proof that it is not so? You do not believe it? Very well, Senor. Perhaps you will tell me of your great wisdom what good to any one can I accomplish?"

He saw something which interested him struggling with the dark gloom of her face, and he answered her gently.

"Am I," he said, "to take the desire for granted?"

"You can do that," she answered ungraciously.

"Good. Well, then, to begin with, there is only one wretched little hospital in San Martina, and that, I understand, is about to be closed for want of funds. A thorough system of trained nurses is required——"

"The first thing which occurred to me was this," she interrupted. "Months ago I sent for some books on nursing, and when I thought that I had gained some little knowledge about it, I asked my father to allow me to have a meeting of the women of San Martina here, and organise a band of amateur nurses under the direction of the doctor. I proposed—but never mind about that. It is no matter, for my father flatly refused to allow me to do anything of the sort."

"And your mother?"

"Agreed with him thoroughly. She was profoundly shocked. Do you not understand that my father and mother are a mixture of French and Spanish, and they have imbibed the imbecility of both nations as regards the position of their children? Do you not understand that I am practically doomed to consider myself unborn—uncreated—until my marriage? I may not put my hand to

any useful work. I may not assume any position whatever. I am worse off really than those poor creatures whom you have brought out here and set free."

Dene was silent for a moment. He felt vaguely that there was a good deal which he ought to say to her concerning home duties and personal development, and at the same time he felt an absolute inability to say it. The appearance of a negro servant summoning them to tea was almost a relief to him.

The Senora was smiling placidly at them from behind a small table, at which were many small cups and an impossible teapot.

"You have seen it," she cried. "You agree with me. It is unrivalled."

Dene for a moment was bewildered. Lucia, who was still by his side, laughed and whispered in his ear—

"The green Carmenita!"

CHAPTER V

A MEETING AT THE HOTEL

NOTWITHSTANDING Lucia's silence and apparent abstraction, her mother found several encouraging symptoms in her demeanour towards Dene during tea-time and the half-hour which followed. She seldom addressed him, or answered any of his remarks save in monosyllables, but more than once the Senora had found her watching and listening to him with a newly awakened interest in her manner. Dene's behaviour, too, was in a sense satisfactory. He showed no signs of moving for some time after the tea equipage had been removed, and he asked twice after Eugene Rimarez, who had not put in an appearance all day. When at last he rose, the President felt that he could without any suspicion of over-cordiality invite him to remain to dinner.

"You are not going on to Beau Desir to-night, Senor Dene?" he inquired.

Dene shook his head.

"I shall not get away before to-morrow at the earliest," he answered. "I have brought a great deal of machinery

over with me which I want to see unloaded. They will not be able to commence it till to-morrow morning."

"Then will you do us the honour," the President asked, "of dining with us?"

Dene could scarcely have explained to himself why at that moment he should have glanced towards Lucia, but he did so, and, much to his surprise, she met his eyes frankly and with a surprisingly winning smile.

"Do come, *Senor Dene*, if you can," she said.

Both the President and his wife were amazed at a forwardness on the part of their daughter for which her bringing up was certainly not responsible. But, as the recipient of such marked and unusual favour was Gregory Dene, she escaped that expression of disapproval which would certainly in any other case have been forthcoming. Dene did not hesitate for a moment to accept the invitation.

The President walked with him into the hall. Dene paused upon the topmost of the broad flight of steps.

"Shall I have the pleasure of seeing your son this evening, President?" he asked.

The President bowed.

"Without doubt, *Senor Dene*. He should have been here to meet you this afternoon. I do not understand his absence."

Dene was thoughtful for a moment. They did not know then how Eugene Ramirez had spent his morning, or of the arrival of Ternissa Denison. He ventured upon one more question.

"By the bye," he said, "I had a fellow-passenger from

Buenos Ayres here—a Miss Denison. Is she by any chance a friend of yours?"

The President shook his head.

"She must be a stranger here," he said. "The name is English surely."

Dene assented.

"Yes. She came from Liverpool."

The President was mildly surprised.

"Did she say whom she was coming to visit here?" he asked.

"She was curiously reserved as to her plans," Dene said. "She would tell me nothing. I asked you about her because she was met at the docks by your son."

"By Eugene?" the President exclaimed.

"By your son, Eugene," Dene repeated.

The President was thoughtful for a moment. His face grew graver.

"My son has many acquaintances," he said quietly, "whom we know nothing of. I fear that this is one of them. We shall see you at seven o'clock, Senor Dene."

Dene bowed, and made his way out on to the Plaza with a heavy heart. He threaded his way amongst the little knots of saunterers—no one in San Martina seemed ever to have anything particular to do—and made his way to the hotel. Several people stopped him on the way, for already the tall young Englishman, who had brought so many of his countrymen out to San Martina, was a well-known figure in the cosmopolitan little city. There was Almaraz, who owned a string of pack mules and wanted to transport the Senor's stores through the mountain to Beau

Desir, and his brother, who dealt in horses and was a likely buyer for the Northern governments. But Dene lingered only a moment or two on the way. He was not in the humour to make bargains or to talk business. He was not leaving, he said, for a day at least. To-morrow morning he would speak of these things with them. So he passed on and entered the hotel, and there in the little square hall he came face to face with Eugene Rimarez, the very man he was most anxious to meet.

It was evident that the pleasure was not mutual. Rimarez returned his greeting coldly, and although he had been engaged in nothing more momentous than a languid examination of some bills upon the walls, showed every inclination to avoid an encounter. But Dene would not be denied.

"I have been spending the afternoon at the Presidency," he remarked, offering his cigarette case.

Rimarez helped himself mechanically, and nodded.

"And Beau Desir?" he asked, with a momentary show of interest.

"Is mine," Dene answered, drawing the charter from his pocket. "I have become, I believe, the largest landed proprietor in your country. Come into the bar, and we will drink a bottle of wine in honour of the occasion."

It was an offer which Rimarez was not accustomed to refuse. He did so with obvious regret.

"It must be a pleasure reserved for another day," he said. "I am waiting—for a friend."

Dene glanced at him keenly.

Rimarez was flushed and ill-at-ease. As usual, Dene

supposed, he had been drinking more than was good for him.

"I am going back to dine with your people," he said. "Shall I see you?"

"Most likely," Ramirez answered vaguely. "I am due up at the barracks shortly. In fact—I must go now."

Dene nodded and turned away. He had scarcely taken half a dozen steps, however, when he stopped short. He was face to face with Ternissa Denison. She was dressed in a plain white linen suit for walking, and she wore a thick veil. Nevertheless, he could see her start, and the deep colour flush into her cheeks, as her eyes met his.

He raised his broad-brimmed hat gravely, and stood on one side. He was not at first inclined to say anything to her at all. He was both bewildered and anxious. Then something in her face, some mute expression of appeal in the grey eyes which fell so swiftly before his, rekindled his hopes. It was impossible that there was not some explanation of her position. She had half stopped, and he spoke to her more kindly than he had meant to.

"You have found your friends, I trust, Miss Denison?"

"Did I tell you that I had any friends here?" she asked. He hesitated.

"Perhaps," he said, "I took that for granted."

He saw a sudden whitening in her face, and turning round found Ramirez watching them closely. Her gesture—it was instinctive, and certainly one of aversion—inspired him with a sudden determination. He was not content any longer to fence with her. He spoke out.

"You are in trouble," he said. "I cannot believe that

it is impossible for me to help you. You have met with some disappointment, or perhaps you have been misled. Come! I am a fellow-countryman. Let me be your friend."

She drew a sharp little breath, and she answered hurriedly—

"You mean to be kind, I am sure, Mr. Dene—but—you are making a mistake. I do not require—any one's help. I have not been misled or disappointed. You must let me go now, please. Captain Ramirez is waiting for me."

But Dene did not at once stand aside.

"Let me finish what I was going to say," he begged. "You told me on the steamer that you were poor, that you wished for work. I have a position to offer you. I want a schoolmistress for my children at Beau Desir. Come there with me to-morrow and try it."

"You are very kind," she said. "At present I am not able even to consider your offer. I have something very important to do. Goodbye."

She passed him so swiftly that even if he had wished it he could have said nothing. Ramirez, whose face was sullen and dark, raised his hat to her, and they left the hotel together. Dene went slowly up to his room.

CHAPTER VI

FOR A MAN'S LIFE

THEY were scarcely across the Square before Rimarez turned upon his companion with an ugly frown.

"What was it he was saying to you—that clown of an Englishman?" he demanded.

She looked down at him, and smiled.

"Do you mean Mr. Dene?" she inquired.

"Whom else? What was he saying to you?"

"Couldn't you hear?" she asked. "You seemed to be listening very intently."

He twirled his black moustache fiercely.

"Listen to me, Ternissa——"

She interrupted him.

"You have not my permission," she said coldly, "to make use of my Christian name."

He swore under his breath.

"Miss Denison, then. I will call you what you choose, so long as you listen. I am weary of your irresolution. Santa Maria, I am weary to death of it. For what did you come here if you are not prepared?"

"My irresolution, as you term it," she answered, "shall

be ended directly I have seen Arnold. Why don't you take me to him? You should be able to do that."

"You will be very fortunate," he said grimly, "if ever you see Arnold again."

She stopped short.

"What do you mean?" she demanded. "Has anything fresh happened?"

"Something fresh will happen before many hours have passed," he answered. "The people are getting restless about him. As usual, it will be his friends who will work his destruction. They will clamour for him, and he will be shot. Oh, I know my father well. I can read him. I have seen what he has in his mind."

"Then why don't you do something?" she exclaimed. "What are you his friend for? Why don't you set him free?"

"I am not President of San Martina," he answered sullenly.

"You can do it if you will."

"It is possible."

"And you hesitate. You, who have called yourself his friend his ally, his companion."

"It is dangerous. There are many risks."

She flashed a look of bitter scorn upon him.

"Oh. I know what you mean. You want to make your bargain beforehand."

"It is reasonable."

"I wonder," she said quietly, "that you dare to run the risk. I wonder if you would if you knew how much I loathed you."

He was white with passion, but he controlled himself.

"Up to now," he said, "you have managed to conceal that loathing. You have acted as though it were otherwise."

"In England," she said, "I tried to treat you as Arnold's friend. Besides, you were harmless then. Here you have shown yourself for what you are. You are bargaining with me for my brother's life. Who would not hate a creature who stooped to such a thing?"

"It is not such a bad bargain for you," he exclaimed, stifling his anger. "I am the son of the President. You would be the most important woman in San Martina."

She laughed outright. He was furious.

"How you dazzle me," she declared. "What a pinnacle."

He stopped short. They had climbed the hill which overlooked San Martina. Before them was the prison—below the sea.

"Very well," he said. "You ridicule me. I have had enough. I withdraw. Do as you choose without me. Get your Arnold out of there," he motioned fiercely towards the prison, "if you can. Before eight to-morrow he will be shot. I have but to pass the word, and it is done."

If a look could have killed him Ramirez would have been a dead man. She caught his arm and held him.

"You little fiend," she muttered. "If you were half a man you would have had him out from there before now. You needn't go away. Get me in there. You can do it, can't you? I want to see him."

"I will try," he said. "I cannot be sure. Come!"

They reached the prison, a gaunt and bare brick building. Outside the massive door, a sentry in shabby uniform was

standing. He saluted, and allowed them to pass. Inside a score of soldiers were sitting on stools, some playing cards, all smoking cigarettes. At Ramirez' entrance there was some commotion. He glanced fiercely around.

"Lieutenant," he exclaimed, "this is strange discipline. There are prisoners here who need better guarding than this."

An officer came forward and entered into an animated conversation with Ramirez in Portuguese. Meanwhile, the soldiers one and all twirled their moustaches and stared at Ternissa, whispering to each other and laughing. Not one of them offered her a stool, although they all remained seated. Her cheeks grew slowly scarlet with anger. She turned her back upon them, and waited for Ramirez.

He rejoined her in about a quarter of an hour. In answer to her look of interrogation, he shook his head, and drew her towards the door.

"I cannot even see him myself," he whispered. "Outside I will explain it to you."

They passed out again on to the brown hillside.

"Well?" she exclaimed.

"If you ever wish to see him again alive," he said solemnly, "you must accept my terms, and quickly. Yesterday an interview with him would have been easy. He was an ordinary prisoner. To-day I myself should have to get an order to see him. This morning he was transferred to the condemned cell."

She gave a little cry, and stopped short.

"You mean that he is actually in danger, immediate danger?"

"I mean that he will probably be shot within the next twenty-four hours. This is something fresh since I was at headquarters. Evidently they fear a disturbance."

"And you," she cried. "What are you going to do? He was your friend, you were his confederate. If everything was known you would be sharing his cell."

"Hush! hush!" Rimarez cried, glancing nervously around. "We are within earshot of the prison. As to that, you are mistaken. He went too far. But even now I will help him if I can."

"What will you do?" she demanded.

He hesitated.

"I can go to the President, my father," he said, "and beg for his liberty. I can tell him that I fear a rising—that the people will never take the news of his death calmly."

"And if your father refuses to listen to you?" she asked.

"The other means," he said, "are dangerous, and if I failed, why it would be ruin to me."

They turned a corner, and began the descent into the town. Below, a little glare of lights glittered around the Plaza. Inside, little crowds of people were standing about talking. To Ternissa there was nothing unusual in their appearance. Rimarez, better used to San Martina and its ways, saw something significant in those gesticulating groups. A moment before he had been hastening forwards; now he slackened his pace.

"You have only a very few moments," he said, "in which to make up your mind."

"I have made it up," she answered quietly. "I will accept your terms."

He made a quick movement towards her, but she repulsed him with a little shudder.

"I must see Arnold free," she said, "and through you. Then—as you will."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"You are as cold," he said, "as your miserable country, where the sun never shines and one never sees a gay face. Never mind. As you will. Listen. There is no time to be lost. This path leads into the Presidency garden. I shall take it, and see my father at once. I must know what has been determined upon, and make my effort with him. Afterwards, I shall come to the hotel, and let you know. You will not mind going on alone?"

She shook her head. Ramirez raised his hat and disappeared to the right. Ternissa descended into the town, and crossed to the hotel, followed by many curious eyes.

CHAPTER VII

THE PRESIDENT IS FIRM

"JOSÈ dear."

The President paused, and looked back over his shoulder.

"My love."

"You are in a hurry. I wished to speak with you."

"I was going," he said, "to invite Colonel Sanarez and Mopez to dinner."

"And why?"

The President returned to his wife's side. In small matters he had great faith in her sagacity.

"I should like," he explained, "to impress our guest favourably. He has just relieved the Treasury from a position of—er—considerable embarrassment."

"You will be able then," she said, "to let me send something to those tiresome people in Paris?"

The President looked doubtful.

"Well," he said, "it is not an inexhaustible sum. I am afraid it would not be wise to attempt to pay any private accounts. It might create jealousy."

"Worth will send Lucia no more dresses," his wife con-

tinued placidly. "In fact, he said that he was sending a legal summons out."

The President grinned.

"If he does we will hang the fellow," he declared. "About the account, my dear. We will see. Lucia must have her dresses, of course. In the meantime, I must hurry, or Sanarez will have left."

"One moment, José," she cried, detaining him. "It is concerning your invitation of these men that I desired to speak with you. Do not ask them. Let it be a family party."

The President stroked his grey moustache.

"I scarcely see any advantage in that," he remarked. "Mopez is a most marvellous and magnificent liar. When he talks, I begin to wonder myself whether I am not the President of the wealthiest and most prosperous country in the world. He will impress our visitor, and in confidence, my dear Julia, I have reason to believe that this Gregory Dene is a man of great wealth in his own country. He might be very useful to us. Something in the nature of a loan secured by the revenues of the Republic might be suggested. One cannot tell what might come of it."

The lady raised two fat fingers.

"You are very clever in your own way, my dear José," she said, "but there are some things into which you can see no further than your own nose. Bah! Let the money be. It is for Lucia I speak. It is for Lucia I say let this be a family party—you and I, Eugene and Lucia, and the Senor Dene."

The President looked doubtful.

"You think that there is really any chance of that?" he said.

"Who can tell?" she answered. "Yet consider the time they spent together in the garden, and the colour in Lucia's cheeks when they returned. You were not noticing, but I—bah! it was I who sent them there. I can assure you of this, my dear José—never in all her days has our Lucia changed colour for a man, or looked at him as she looked at the Senor Dene."

"She had not much to say to him," the President remarked.

"It is the dear child's way," the Senora answered contentedly. "She is ever thus in our presence. Yet they must have talked of many things in the garden, and did you not hear her ask him to come to dinner? In another it would have been unmaidenly; with Lucia it is not so. She is always so proud and so self-contained."

"The Senor Dene," the President remarked, "does not present himself as a man of gallantry."

The fat little lady leaned back in her chair, and waved her hand contemptuously.

"Bah! In all San Martina, who is there like Lucia? Already she has interested him. In his loneliness at Beau Desir, he will think of her. To-night she will wear her white dress, and she will talk to him. He will go away, he will carry with him the picture of her as she will be to-night, and he will be restless. Then one fine morning there will be business in San Martina, he will ride in—and after that, he will come as often as she wills. Bah! do I not know?"

The President moved to the side window, and looked moodily out across the Place to the prison.

"Well, if you are right," he said, "so much the better. If Lucia were safely disposed of, I should feel all the more comfortable."

"The affairs of the State," she inquired—"are they not flourishing?"

"They are," he answered, "about as unflourishing as affairs can be. In fact, they are fast approaching a crisis. Everybody is robbing the Treasury, and everybody is discontented. The bank has refused to cash government bonds this afternoon."

"The miscreants," she exclaimed. "What shall you do?"

"Oh, we shall probably shoot the bank manager," he answered. "But even then the mischief is done. They have either sent away or hidden the specie. Sanarez, with half a dozen soldiers, searched the place, and found the manager in the cellar. If it were not for this money of Senor Dene's, I believe that San Martina would be in a state of insurrection at this moment. As it is, it will not go far."

The Senora had turned pale, and ceased to wave her fan.

"An insurrection," she exclaimed. "Oh, how detestable that word is. Do not frighten me please, Josè. I can think only of poor Maria Da Costa."

The President shrugged his shoulders, but he was not altogether at his ease. His predecessor and his wife had both been shot during a little difference with the inhabitants, and it was not exactly a pleasant memory.

"If only I dared shoot Sagasta," he said, looking gloomily at the prison. "Unfortunately I have given my word not to until he has had a fair trial, or the people would have had him out before now."

"You could have him tried and found guilty," the Senora suggested. "You could be the judge yourself. You have managed these things before."

"The people would be up in an hour," he said. "They are greatly incensed now at his detention. You cannot walk in the streets without hearing his name. I am not sure that I dare trust even my soldiers if they were ordered to shoot him."

The Senora's fat little face was wrinkled up with thought.

"Ugh!" she exclaimed. "Are there not secret ways of disposing of such pests? It could be given out that he had died."

The President shook his head gloomily.

"The people would never believe that he had died a natural death," he said, with a sigh. "They are so miserably suspicious. No. So far as I can see there is one thing, and one thing only, which can pull us through."

"And that?" the Senora asked.

"The suggestion came from you. If Gregory Dene were to ask me for Lucia, it would be salvation."

The Senora fluttered her fan, and her black eyes twinkled.

"Explain," she demanded.

"Dene would be an excellent ally. He is popular with the people. He is rich, and an Englishman. If he could be persuaded to take office with me, all immediate danger would be at an end."

"Immediate danger," the Senora repeated, half closing her eyes. "Ugh."

"Well, I mean it," the President declared. "In the event of a rising, I would not give much for the lives of any of us. There is one consolation only. Samarez and Mopez are more hated even than we are. They would go first. Would it not be as well, Julie, to give Lucia a hint?"

The Senora protested most vigorously.

"Do not dream of it, my dear José," she begged. "It would spoil everything. Lucia is the most extraordinary, the most peculiar girl in the world. I alone can manage her—and I—even I am sometimes puzzled. If you were to tell her of our desire she would not speak a word to him all the evening. Why, José, let me tell you this. If she had any idea as to the real state of affairs here, she would disclose everything to him, and he would be wanting his money back again. If you speak of Senor Dene to her at all, let it be slightly. Do not praise him, or make much of him before her. It would be fatal. All would be undone."

The President smiled.

"In your way, my dear," he said, "you are a clever woman. I leave all to you. Only remember that the affair is of vital importance to us."

She nodded her head—a slow, mysterious gesture. It was an enterprise which commended itself to her.

"You will see," she exclaimed. "You will see how I shall manage it. But Eugène—where is he? The Senor Dene asked twice for him. He must dine with us to-night."

The President's face darkened.

"Concerning Eugène," he said, there is a great deal which I should like to say to you. My patience has a limit, and Eugène is fast approaching it."

"Is it anything more than I know?—anything new?" she asked anxiously.

"Anything new," he repeated impatiently. "What need is there of anything new? He has all the vices. The saints know that our discipline is lax enough, but his colonel has complained to me repeatedly. He is but an indifferent soldier, and he makes no effort to improve. All his time he wastes in the hotels or worse places. He is my son, and my only son, but my patience has its limits. He is on the point of overstepping them. I have told him in plain words that the next time he is discovered drunk he will be put under arrest, tried, and degraded. Yesterday he escaped by the skin of his teeth only. To-day no one knows where he is, but I heard by chance that he is at the hotel with a companion—of the usual sort."

The Senora dabbed her eyes with a small handkerchief. Suddenly she half rose from her chair and waved her hand frantically to some one out of the window.

"It is he—Eugène!" she cried. "Eugène, my son, come hither! At least to-day he is sober. See how well he looks."

The young man turned round with manifest disinclination, and, waving his hat, was on the point of hurrying off. But the President, who had joined his wife at the window, summoned him back with an imperious gesture.

"Where were you going, Eugène?" he asked.

"To your room, sir," Eugène answered.

"You wished to speak to me?"

"Yes."

"You can do so here."

The young man came slowly up the piazza steps, and, taking off his white cap, began to fan himself with it. He was obviously ill-at-ease.

"It is about him," he said, inclining his head towards the prison.

"Sagasta?"

"Yes."

"What have you to say?"

"I think," Eugène said slowly, "that I would have him shot."

His father looked at him coldly.

"Why?"

"The people are beginning to get excited. They may storm the prison at any moment."

"And if we have him shot, what then? Will they not storm the Presidency instead?"

Eugène shook his head.

"No. They will have no leader. They are like sheep; without Sagasta they are not dangerous."

The President regarded his son for a moment with cold contempt.

"You called yourself his friend, Eugène," he said slowly.

"What you were planning with him you two alone know. It answered your purpose to betray him, and you did so. Now you come to me and calmly recommend his assassination. You give crafty reasons enough, but I think I know

your real one. You are afraid to meet him face to face. You fear that if he were free, vengeance upon you would be his first instinct."

Eugène flushed up to the temples.

"What I did," he said, "was for all our good."

The President sighed.

"We are all poor creatures enough out here," he said, "but as I live, Eugène, I would rather have seen you up like a man with your sword in your hand side by side with Sagasta in open rebellion against me than have had you first betray him and then come whining for his assassination. Now, listen to me. Sagasta shall not be harmed unless the people rise. So long as they remain quiet he is safe. And listen to me further. If the time comes, as I hope it may, when I can set him free, I will put a sword into your hand and a sword into his, and for once, at any rate, you shall quit yourself like a man, or he shall avenge himself for your treachery."

"José, José! how cruel you are!" the Senora cried.

"Eugène is our son. You would not see him butchered!"

The President's eyes blazed fiercely.

"He is our son," he answered sternly; "but——"

He stopped short. In his heart there was a weak spot for that fat, honest little lady who had at least been a loyal companion to him. There was something in her face just then as she sat with her tearful eyes fastened upon Eugène which suddenly touched him. He would not let her know all that he suspected. He was silent—he did not attempt to finish his sentence. Eugène, who was pale now with fear, turned to leave them.

"Where are you going, Eugène?" his mother asked tearfully.

"I have an engagement," he muttered. "Some friends at the hotel."

"You must send them an excuse, then," his father said drily. "I require you to dine here to-night to meet Senor Dene."

The young man's face became white with passion. A half-smothered oath escaped from his lips.

"But it is impossible," he protested in a low tone. "I have guests."

"You will dine here to-night, Eugène," his father repeated. "And remember, when you choose to entertain your friends you can do so here. Explain my wishes to your friends, if necessary."

Eugène drew a quick little breath. He was horribly afraid of his father, especially just now, but it was altogether too vexatious. He could not give in without a struggle.

"If you will excuse me for this once only——" he pleaded.

The President interrupted him.

"Eugène," he said coldly, "I know of your guest. Let that be sufficient for you. Do not dare to obtrude your vices upon our notice. Report yourself in my dressing-room at seven o'clock."

Eugène made an effort to submit gracefully, but the smile which showed his yellow teeth was not a pleasant one. He raised his hat to his mother and turned away.

"That is another account," he muttered under his breath, "which I shall have to settle with the Senor Dene."

CHAPTER VIII

BY ORDER OF THE STATE

“YOU are back again—so soon !”

Eugène Rimarez closed the door of her sitting-room behind him and threw his cap upon the table. He had come straight from the interview with his father, and he was in an evil humour.

“Yes, I am back. You need not show quite so plainly how unwelcome my coming is. You look at me as though I were your worst enemy.”

“That is precisely,” she answered, “how I do regard you.”

His eyes were lit with a wicked fire. He stretched out his hand as though to take his cap from the table.

“It is enough,” he declared. “I have an errand at the prison ; I hasten to execute it.”

Her looks showed plainly how glad she was to have him go. Yet he lingered.

“It is a mournful duty,” he said. “It is hard that it should have fallen to my lot, for, after all, Arnold and I have been friends.”

She rose to her feet quickly.

"What do you mean?" she cried.

He drew a document from his pocket and spread it out before her.

"You can read it," he said. "It is very clear. I went to my father and pleaded my hardest for Arnold. He listened in silence. When I had finished he simply handed me this paper. You can see what it is. I am to take a file of soldiers to the prison and have him shot immediately. It is an order signed by my father, and to it is affixed the seal of the Republic of San Martina."

"What are you going to do?" she asked breathlessly.

"It depends," he answered, "upon you."

"Upon me!"

Her tone was one of despair. Ramirez laid down his cap and moved closer to her side.

"Ternissa," he said softly, "why all this fear? Is it that you doubt my affection for you? You cannot do that. You must believe that I adore you. See what I am willing to do—to risk for your sake. I will tear into pieces this parchment."

She withdrew herself from his too close proximity, and thrust his hand from her wrist.

"If you really cared for me," she said slowly, "if you understood in the least what love was, you would not for ever be trying to make a bargain with me; you would not be content to make me miserable; you would not seek to constrain me to do a thing I loathe. If, indeed, you loved me," she added in a lower key, "you would tear up that paper before my eyes instead of seeking to use it as a bribe."

"It is not my way," he answered. "Any means which will gain my end are welcome to me."

"No," she answered; "it is not your way."

Then there was a silence. On the table between them laid the parchment with its red seal uppermost. It was the life of the man who was dearer to her than any one else on earth.

"You must keep it back," she said at last, "until to-morrow."

"And when to-morrow comes," he exclaimed impatiently, "you will not have made up your mind. Again you will seek more delay. You will say, as you say now, 'Wait a little; wait a little.' It is so all the time. No; I say there has been enough putting off. It shall be now."

"You had better be careful," she murmured. "If you press me just now I may say no."

"You may," he admitted, "but I do not think that you will. Listen."

A clock struck the hour. Eugène swore softly as he remembered the necessity for his appearance at the Presidency. At least, however, he might obtain some credit for his forced absence.

"Come!" he exclaimed. "I will be generous. I will go away now; I will not come to you again until to-morrow. You shall have your own way. I am too weak; a woman can do anything with me. A woman like you, Ternissa, can make me—her slave."

His arm was suddenly around her waist. She whirled herself away with an exclamation of anger.

"Have I not told you," she protested passionately, "that I will not be touched? I detest it."

"But consider," he pleaded, "that I love you."

"Consider also," she retorted, "that I hate you."

An oath broke from Eugène's lips. He was shaking with anger.

"You will have to be more civil some day," he said in a low, hoarse tone. "Meanwhile, I leave you. It is—until to-morrow."

* * * * *

Ternissa was left to herself only for a few minutes. She was still standing at the window gazing towards the gaunt-looking prison on the hill when she heard the door of her room opened without even a preliminary knock. She looked hastily round. It was the landlord of the hotel, who stood there holding in his hand a sheet of paper.

"It is the bill of mademoiselle," he explained, tendering it to her.

"I do not require it at present," she answered. "I am not leaving to-day, at any rate."

The landlord — a little Frenchman — shrugged his shoulders.

"Nevertheless," he repeated, "it is the bill of mademoiselle. I regret that these rooms are required. I cannot possibly accommodate mademoiselle."

She looked at him in amazement.

"What do you mean?" she demanded. "The hotel is almost empty. If you require these rooms particularly others will do for me."

"I regret," he repeated, "that I cannot accommodate mademoiselle."

The colour rose slowly into her cheeks. The man's bearing was insolent and offensive. His black eyes sought hers boldly. His smile was an insult. He was a very different person to the cringing little man who had welcomed her all politeness and bows.

"Do you mean," she said, "that you wish to turn me out?"

"I mean," he said, "that it would be well for mademoiselle to seek more suitable quarters. Mine is a respectable family hotel. You should take rooms in the quarter St. Michael—*Mais monsieur ! monsieur !*"

The door had been suddenly thrown open, and Dene, who was in a towering rage, had stretched forth a great hand, and, lifting the little man up by the collar, had shaken him as though he were a rat. When he set him down his cheeks were livid and his teeth were chattering. Dene was still beside himself with anger.

"Now tell me what you mean, sir, by insulting this lady," he said fiercely.

Monsieur Legrasse was cringing, but quite ready to justify himself.

"Indeed, monsieur," he explained, "I have not the desire to insult mademoiselle. I have merely obeyed orders which I dared not ignore. It is Monsieur the President who has written to me himself. Will Monsieur Dene but read his note?"

Dene glanced through the note which Legrasse handed to him, and which was certainly signed by the President; then, with an angry exclamation, he tore it into pieces.

"The President has been misinformed," Dene declared shortly. "I shall see him in a few minutes, and I will set matters straight. In the meantime, get out, and take your bill with you!"

The landlord withdrew, but with considerably less than his usual politeness. Dene closed the door after him. Then he turned to Ternissa.

Her first expression on seeing him had been one of glad relief; since then her face had clouded over. She addressed him coldly.

"I have given you no permission to come here, or to interfere in my affairs, Mr. Dene," she said. "Please explain your visit at once, and leave me."

"Mine," he said bluntly, "is the next room, and the hotel is like a great match-box. I heard a few words of your conversation with Eugène Ramirez—also I heard what Legrasse had the effrontery to say to you."

She looked at him steadily.

"You mean," she said, "that you have been listening."

"I heard what Legrasse said to you," he repeated.

"You are aware, I suppose, in what light such conduct must appear to me?" she remarked coldly.

"I cannot help it," he answered. "I heard the man's insolence, and it was more than flesh and blood could stand. Listen to me, Miss Denison. You are alone in this outlandish place, and I claim the right to be your friend. You hold me all the while at arm's length. It is not reasonable. Come! I have a bargain to make with you. I simply say that I know you are in some trouble, and you must let me help you. I am a fellow-countryman,

and I am not powerless here. The President is favourably disposed towards me. I have money and some influence; they are at your service. I want to extricate you from your present dilemma, whatever it may be. Afterwards we can be friends or not, as you choose."

"Mr. Dene," she answered firmly, "I know that you mean to be kind, or I should have ordered you out of the room before. I will not say what I think of your conduct in playing the eavesdropper; I will try to forget it, and I will think of you as a friend if you will only do as I ask you. I am in great trouble and in a great difficulty; I admit that, but there is only one man who can help me. and that man is not you. Every time you thrust yourself—forgive my plain speaking—upon me, you only enhance my difficulties. Now please to leave me."

"You do not wish me, then, even to speak of you to the President?" he asked.

"Most certainly not. I only wish you to go away."

"You leave me," he said, with a sudden cold fear at his heart, "no alternative. Only remember that my offer of a home at Beau Desir is still open to you. You will be welcome there whenever you choose to come."

Dene turned and left the room. Outside on the landing Mons. Legrasse was waiting.

CHAPTER IX

A DINNER PARTY AT THE PRESIDENCY

DENE, as he made his way across the Square to the President's house, found every corner blocked with little groups of gesticulating and excited men talking eagerly together and pointing often to the dingy-looking prison on the hill. One name he heard continually upon their lips—"Sagasta"—and the same name had just been pronounced by the Senora Rimarez when the black footman in resplendent livery opened the drawing-room door and announced his arrival to the President and his wife.

"Sagasta!" Dene repeated as he bowed to the Senora. "Is it a man's name, or a new orchid, or the name of a country? I heard it a dozen times as I crossed the Plaza, and again from your lips as I entered the room."

"Sagasta," said a voice from behind him, "is the name of a man who is most unjustly kept in the prison of San Martina."

Dene turned round, and had some difficulty in restraining the exclamation which rose to his lips. Lucia had glided out from the conservatory, looking like a beautiful picture in the white muslin gown which hung so softly and

gracefully about her straight, slim figure. A necklace of pearls gleamed upon her white throat, a single scarlet flower seemed somehow to have entwined itself amongst the dark coils of her jet-black hair. She welcomed Dene with a brilliant smile, and for the first time he realised how charming her natural expression was. But almost as he bent over her fingers some shadow of the old sullenness fell upon her face.

"Is that possible?" Dene remarked a little absently, with his eyes still fixed upon Lucia, "in so admirably governed a State as San Martina?"

"My daughter," the President said stiffly, with a disapproving glance towards her, "is naturally wholly ignorant of the politics of the State. Sagasta was at one time a very clever and a very useful citizen, and no one regretted more than I the—er—ill-advised behaviour which compelled us to take severe measures."

Lucia shrugged her beautiful shoulders, but her eyes were lit with fire.

"Sagasta was ill-advised, it is true," she said. "He was ill-advised to trust in those who betrayed him. Yet he was honest, and there are few like him in San Martina. If there were more we should have a peaceful and happy time, instead of trembling day by day lest some one or other should proclaim a revolution."

"Is it really as bad as that?" Dene asked gravely.

The President was white with rage, but he kept his dignity.

"I trust you will remember, Senor Dene," he said, "that my daughter is young and impressionable, and also that

she is speaking of a matter concerning which she is wholly ignorant."

Lucia's lip curled, but she answered nothing. Dinner was announced, and Dene gave his arm to the Senora. For a few minutes conversation was abandoned; but as they crossed the great stone hall Dene could hear the President talking to Lucia in a low, severe tone. The girl took her seat with a hard, defiant look upon her face—her whole expression for the moment was changed.

Dinner was served at a round table in the centre of a great, somewhat bare-looking apartment. Four negro servants, in handsome livery and superintended by an English butler, waited at table, and two more worked the great fans which hung from the ceiling. The cooking and wines were alike excellent. As the dinner progressed Dene grew a little thoughtful. He had seen so much poverty during the day amongst the half-breeds and lower classes of the town, that the contrast with such magnificence as this was rather unpleasantly suggestive. There were no guests, but Eugène came in late and took his seat after a constrained greeting with Dene.

There was at first but little conversation. Lucia, who ate very little and drank water, was taciturn and almost morose; her mother, who ate a great deal, beamed on everybody, and only attempted monosyllables. The President was for a while severely silent. As the *entrées* were brought in, however, he thawed a little, and returned to the former subject of conversation.

"You must not allow yourself to think, Senor Dene," he said, "that my daughter's very ill-advised remark has

any real significance. Of course, in San Martina the population is so mixed that there is a great deal of racial feeling, and this leads at times to much wild talk. But, taken as a whole, I believe that the present Government is popular. We work for the people, and taxation is very light. There has been no such thing as a revolution for years now, nor are there any present signs of one."

Lucia listened with scornful face and Dene with polite attention. And then through the wide balcony hung with light mosquito netting, but otherwise open to the street, there came floating up a low muttering cry—

"Sagasta !"

"What has been done to Sagasta ?"

"Give him up to us."

"Sagasta !"

The President controlled his features admirably, but Senora Ramirez turned pale. Eugène muttered something beneath his breath and turned with a look of inquiry to his father. The President nodded, and Eugène left the room.

"This man Sagasta," Dene remarked, proceeding with his dinner, "appears to be popular."

The President poured out and drank a full glass of champagne.

"Amongst the idlers and the scum of the city," he said sternly. "He is what you would call in England an anarchist, or a socialist."

"There is a considerable difference," Dene remarked, smiling. "I am generally supposed to be some sort of a socialist myself, but God preserve us from anarchists !"

Lucia flashed upon him a softer look.

"It is true," she said. "What you have done for your people at Beau Desir proves it. It is what Sagasta would like to do for San Martina."

The President kept his temper admirably. He even smiled indulgently at his daughter.

"The Senor Dene," he said, "has bought and paid for his land like a man of honour and justice. What he does with it is his own concern. Sagasta, from the most charitable point of view, would rob and pillage the rich for the sake of the poor. The inequalities of states which exist are perhaps to be deplored, but while one man has brains and another muscle they are inevitable. We who are called upon to govern cannot fail to realise this."

"Sagasta personally——" Dene began.

"I do not believe in," the President interrupted. "I take the liberty there, you see, of differing even from my daughter." He bowed to her sarcastically. "He is a man of parts and intelligence, but what he desires is power and position for himself. He would rise to these on the shoulders of the people."

"Is he," Dene asked, "a Spaniard?"

The President and his wife exchanged swift glances, and almost simultaneously both frowned at Lucia. But she only smiled.

"Senor Sagasta," she said, "is an English gentleman."

Dene looked up with amazement. The President groaned to himself. Here was another complication. Dene would very likely interfere now and protest against his being shot.

"Why, I was at college with a Sagasta!" Dene exclaimed. "It would not by any possible chance be the same man."

"It is very likely indeed," Lucia continued, much interested. "He was at Magdalen College, Oxford."

Dene set down his glass.

"Arnold Sagasta, as I live!" he declared. "This is a most extraordinary thing. After all, how small the world is. Sagasta was once an acquaintance of mine. How long has he been out here?"

The President waved his hand, and the servants fell back out of hearing.

"Sagasta," he said, "has been here in San Martina for ten years. For the first part of the time he was a very valuable inhabitant, who took his place in our counsels, was highly respected, and was looked upon as one of our most prominent citizens. He was a guest in my house continually, and but for his own folly he might to-day have occupied the post of my secretary and chief adviser."

Lucia shrugged her white shoulders and opened her lips as though to speak. A glance from her father, however, kept her silent. There were times when the President was a dangerous man.

"Five years ago," the President continued calmly, "he became associated with a party of the State who have ruined him as they have ruined many a better man. Since then his downfall has been slow but sure. His business has declined; he spent all his time discussing anarchy and rebellion with all the riff-raff of the place, who are too lazy to work and too mischievous to permit others to do so.

Two months ago I found him implicated in a proposed rebellion against me, and I was compelled to have him arrested and thrust into prison. He is there now, and his fate is undecided."

"I am sorry to hear this," Dène said gravely. "I should like very much to see him, if you could arrange it."

"We will talk further of it over a cigar," the President said. "Meanwhile——"

He raised his hand and the service of dinner was continued. In a few minutes the Senora arose, and Lucia followed her. Dene, as he stood behind his chair, felt the girl's dark eyes challenge his, and looked steadily into them. It was only a momentary glance, but it thrilled him. There was something which she had to say to him. He resumed his seat most unwillingly.

CHAPTER X

SAGASTA

"TO return," the President said, carefully choosing himself a cigar, "to the subject of Sagasta. Will you take a glass of Chateau-y-quem or a liqueur?"

Dene helped himself mechanically.

"Poor Sagasta!" he murmured.

"No one," the President continued, "regrets his downfall more than I do, for he might have become my most useful and trusted helper in the State. He preferred to ally himself with the disreputable party, the scum of the whole place, and actually to become the organiser of an attempted rising against us. He is bound, of course, to pay the penalty. What that may be I am not at present absolutely prepared to state. I myself am on the side of mercy, but I am somewhat awkwardly situated. On the one hand I have to deal with a very dangerous sub-population of half-breeds—low caste Portuguese and natives, who are all on his side; on the other, all the more respectable inhabitants of the place will listen to nothing but the very firmest measures."

"Do you mean by that—death?" Dene asked.

The President assented gravely. As a matter of fact, his nod to Eugène had been Sagasta's death warrant.

"If it were not for my personal influence," the President continued, "Sagasta would have been shot any day during the last month. If there is much more of this——"he held up his finger, and Dene caught the sound of many voices in the Place below—"he must die! I cannot possibly hold out much longer."

"I should like very much to see him," Dene said. "Don't you think that he might be got out of the country quite quietly? If we had his word not to return, that would end the difficulty, would it not?"

"It would end it in a manner which would be most agreeable to me," the President said thoughtfully. "I am no lover of bloodshed, although in a young unformed country like this strong measures have often to be taken. I shall give you an order to see him, Senor Dene, but I want you to remember this: I send you openly and without reservation to see my worst enemy. You will find him very bitter against me. He will abuse me personally, my government, and the whole country. I place no obstacle in the way of your free intercourse with him, but I am sure that you will not allow yourself to be prejudiced by a fanatic."

"I will remember all that you have said," Dene answered. "Sagasta was always hot-headed and impetuous, and I daresay his imprisonment will have made him sore."

"Very well then," the President said, rising. "We will go into my study, Senor Dene, and I will write you the

order. But, first of all—you hear that murmuring under the windows? Step outside cautiously—do not show yourself, but gain a view of the Place below, and see for yourself what manner of people these are who clamour for Sagasta."

Dene walked carefully out on to the broad verandah, and, keeping in the shadow of one of the white pillars, peered downward through the mosquito netting. Little groups of men were dotted about all over the Place talking together eagerly, and directly below a much larger crowd were gathered together standing for the most part in sullen silence. Dene noticed that all the shops which fronted the Plaza were secured with boarding, and the lower windows of the Government house itself were barred with iron shutters. A double row of sentries stood motionless against the wall, armed with rifles which were obviously ready for immediate use. There was an undeniable tinge of excitement in the air. The faces of the men were certainly not prepossessing. They were a bad lot as a whole—that Dene could readily believe; but they were also a dangerous lot. Then there happened something which was to altogether convince him of it. He moved a step forward to see further down the Square; almost immediately there was a loud report from below, a blinding sheet of flame, and Dene felt his right cheek suddenly hot. The President rushed forward and dragged him into the room.

"Did I not tell you not to show yourself, *Senor Dene*?" he said coolly. "They mistook you for me. There is always an assassin in an excited crowd like that,

every one of whom is armed. You have had a narrow escape."

Dene dabbed his cheek with his handkerchief, and was surprised to find no blood there. The bullet must have passed within an inch of him.

"Yours must be a somewhat unpleasant position," he remarked to the President. "Does this sort of thing happen often?"

The President shook his head.

"Not so often, Senor, as you might imagine," he answered. "You see I know them, and I know how to deal with them. It is at night, when they have been drinking, that they are most desperate. I never show myself then. I am sorry that I did not warn you more definitely."

There was the sound of a scuffle, a hoarse cry, and the report of a rifle. They approached the window and looked carefully out. The body of a man was being carried away by two of the sentries, surrounded by a little escort.

"They have shot the fellow," the President remarked. "It is summary justice, but he deserved it."

Dene drew back with a little shudder. He was not used to this light regarding of human life. The President watched him with some anxiety.

"You must not imagine, Senor Dene," he said, "that this is exactly an everyday occurrence. Do not think us any worse than we are. There is a good deal of agitation just now about Sagasta; otherwise my citizens, as a rule, are a law-abiding body, and we have little real trouble. Come! I have written out your order; it is here. We

will, if you are ready, join my wife and daughter. Take a liqueur and light another cigarette. Good! We will go now and look for some coffee."

They found the Senora alone in the drawing-room, and half asleep. She woke up at their coming, smiled placidly, and dispensed some coffee in tiny Dresden cups. Lucia was nowhere to be seen, but when Dene mentioned her name, the Senora inclined her head towards the conservatory.

"Lucia is amongst the palms," she said. "Will you go and talk to her? It is very cool there, but I am always lazy after dinner."

Dene rose at once and went in search of her. She was in one of the darkest corners of the conservatory, herself something like a beautiful exotic flower in her white gown, standing upon the marble pavement with her hands clasped together, and her dark eyes flashing and glowing upon him like stars as he came towards her. It was not until he stood by her side that she spoke.

"How long you have been," she said softly. "I began to think that you were not coming at all—that I should not see you again. You understood that I had something to say to you?"

Her voice was almost a whisper in his ears, and he was conscious of a distinct thrill of admiration as he looked at her. She was so slim, and white, and graceful, and there was no longer any frown. Her lips were parted in a dazzling smile. She seemed to draw him to her, and he was bewildered at the effect her beauty had upon him.

"I came," he answered with an attempt at lightness, "as

soon as your father would permit me. That I am able to at all is owing to the wretched shooting of your charming townspeople."

The smile died from her lips.

"I heard a shot," she said. "Was it fired at you?"

He nodded.

"I was mistaken," he explained, "for your father. It was one of Sagasta's friends who was trying his skill."

She sighed.

"If anything happens to Sagasta," she remarked, "there will be more than a little wild shooting. My father has been talking to you about him?"

"Yes."

"I wonder," she said thoughtfully, "how much he has told you."

"For instance?"

"Did he tell you that Sagasta was once Eugène's friend, and mine?"

"I understood," Dene answered, "that he had been on friendly terms with you all."

"Did he tell you," she continued, looking down and breaking off a scarlet flower which hung down from the roof, "that he went with Eugène to Europe, that he was our constant companion, that he almost lived here?"

He received suddenly an odd little shock. He looked down at her, and for a moment their eyes met. The rich colour streamed into her face.

"Was he anything more than a companion to you?" he asked gravely.

She laughed softly and gaily, such a laugh that drove

away every vestige of the curious fear which for a moment had seized him.

"Poor Arnold," she said. "No, he has never made love to me, if that is what you mean. Yet we were friends, and he trusted me. He told me his very sad history, and I pitied him. At least, I do not mean him to die. If no one else can save him, I shall."

She spoke simply but firmly. He regarded her with admiration.

"What can you do?"

"Do not ask me," she answered. "It is much better for you not to know. You are going to help me, but it will be unknown even to yourself."

"Well," he said, "there was a time when I rather liked Arnold Sagasta. I meant to try what I could do."

"I wonder," she asked, dropping her voice a little, "have you received permission to visit him?"

"Yes."

"You have a written order?"

"Yes."

"Signed by my father?"

Again he assented.

"Which pocket is it in?"

He showed it her in his breast pocket. She calmly took it out and read it.

"The bearer may have a private interview with the prisoner, Sagasta.—RIMAREZ."

She folded it up, and before he could stop her she had thrust it into the bosom of her gown.

"Listen," she said. "This has been stolen from you."

Remember that. You do not know by whom ; or if even that little white lie is too much for you, keep your own counsel. It has been stolen from you. There is just a chance. That is all ! ”

“ You are going to make use of it ? ” he asked.

“ Never mind. Now please take me back into the drawing-room, and would you mind making a little effort—for Sagasta’s sake ? ”

Again the dark eyes were mischievously raised to his. Her head was so close that the perfume from that single scarlet flower in her hair seemed to fill the air with a peculiar fragrance.

“ For the sake of—Sagasta,” he answered. “ I am your servant. Only you must tell me what I am to do.”

She broke off an orchid, and thrust it through his button-hole.

“ Well, I do not want them to think that we have been talking seriously at all. That is why I am decorating you. Now, will you please make a great effort and be very attentive—that is the word, is it not ?—to me for about ten minutes. Then I shall release you, for it is getting late.”

She laid her hand upon his coat sleeve, and they entered the drawing-room together. The Senora beamed graciously upon them. Ramirez, who was writing at a table, paused for a moment to marvel at his wife’s forethought as he noted the air of confidence between them. Lucia drew him towards a huge lounge at the further end of the room, and picked up a mandoline.

“ I shall sing you now,” she said, “ a little song ! Then I shall go away.”

She sang a little French chanson, a Breton love-song, very sweetly and very softly. The music was so dainty, and her voice so delicate, that long after she had struck the last bar he sat there hoping for more. Then he heard the rustling of her gown. He looked up. Her place was empty, she had reached the door. He sprang to his feet, and she waved him a laughing good-night. The President and his wife exchanged glances and a smile.

"The thing was already," the Senora thought, "as good as settled."

CHAPTER XI

A RESCUE

A MAN was sitting alone in a room of the prison of San Martina. It was scarcely a cell in which he had been placed, yet it was hard to conceive a more miserable apartment. The floor was bare, the walls had once been whitewashed, but were now thickly encrusted with all manner of dirt and cobwebs. There was no furniture save a chair, a wooden bed, and a table, all of the plainest and most wretched description. No wonder that the man who sat there was miserable.

He was neither young nor old, handsome or ugly—yet here ended all kinship with the nonentity. He was slim and dark, with mobile features, and a mouth whose humorous and sensitive proclivities made it the most marked feature of his face. He sat with his hollow eyes fixed steadfastly upon the little level patch of deep-blue sky visible through the iron bars of his prison window. Dimly he could see the lights of the town, faintly he could hear the echoes of many voices from the people thronging the Square, and neither the sight nor the hearing seemed pleasant to him.

He drew his cigarette from his mouth, and holding it between his fingers, began to talk softly to himself.

"A pack of cowardly scum after all," he muttered. "Not a man amongst them, or they would have had me out of this before now. If Rimarez can keep them quiet a little longer he will be safe. They will forget me, and what I have taught them. He can use the iron heel again, and down the poor cowards will go, cringing and suffering in silence. What a race it is. What a race of liars and cravens! But, oh, my friend Eugène, what would I not give for ten minutes, five minutes even, here alone with you. It would repay me for everything. If ever again I am a free man, there is a heavy reckoning for you and for me."

He relit his cigarette, which had gone out, and began to walk leisurely up and down the room, his hands behind his back, his eyes fixed moodily upon the floor. Suddenly he stopped short, and listened. Footsteps were at hand, approaching with measured beat along the narrow corridor. There was the jailer's heavy tramp, but he was not alone. Whilst Sagasta was wondering who his companion might be, the great key turned in the lock, the door was thrown open, and a young man in a familiar uniform and military cap slouched over his eyes was ushered in.

Sagasta gazed at him for a moment with contracted brows and an expression of blank wonderment.

"Eugène," he cried. "Why, what in the name of all that is sinful brings you—here?"

The young man shrugged his shoulders and looked behind. When he was quite sure that the door had been closed, and that they were alone, he turned round and

removed his cap. Sagasta's first surprise was as nothing compared with his subsequent amazement. He seemed bereft for the moment of words. He went up to his visitor, and laid his hands upon his shoulders.

"If I am not dreaming," he exclaimed, "it's—why, I'm hanged if it is not Lucia."

The girl shook herself gently free from his clasp, and drew her cloak around her.

"Of course it is Lucia," she answered a little pettishly. "As I have suffered the annoyance and inconvenience of assuming this most uncomfortable disguise, the least you can do is to pretend that you do not see me."

"It is assumed already," Sagasta answered. "If one might venture to inquire——"

"Oh, there is no time to waste," she interrupted. "Listen to me. I have come, if I can, to save your life. The President has signed your death-warrant; Eugène is now endeavouring to get a file of soldiers whom he can rely upon to shoot you. They have made up their minds to get rid of you."

"I am exceedingly obliged to them," he said, "but I shall object very strongly to anything of the sort."

"Nevertheless," she continued, "it is as I say. Your death-warrant is signed, the soldiers may arrive at any moment."

"This is the work, I presume," he said, "of your delightful brother?"

She nodded.

"Chiefly. My father, too, has a very bad opinion of you. He has quite decided to have you shot."

Sagasta smiled grimly.

"I may find a way to cheat their bullets yet," he remarked. "Tell me, now, why you have come here."

"To save you, if I can."

He looked at her admiringly.

"What a thoroughbred little brick you are, Lucia!" he exclaimed. "I only hope you won't get into trouble."

"Not if you do exactly as I say," she answered, "without delay, without hesitation. Listen! Take my cap and cloak. March boldly out of the place. The password is, 'Glorious San Martina,' and the countersign, 'Long life to President Rimarez.' Keep your coat buttoned up to your throat. I have told every one that I have neuralgia."

"But you," he objected. "What is to become of you?"

"I have made all my plans," she answered. "I shall slip across the passage there into the governor's room. I have had him summoned to the Presidency, but, as Captain Rimarez, I have the *entrée* to his rooms. Then I shall leave the prison a little after you by his private door. You have only to reach the town, and you are safe. The people will not let you be retaken."

"They have not as yet," he remarked drily, "shown themselves much concerned about me."

"You would not have said so," she answered, "if you could have heard them this evening. Your name has been on their lips hour by hour. As we sat at dinner to-night we heard them in the Place shouting for Sagasta. What they need is a leader. They are a flimsy race—they have no backbone. If one had stood up before them and had said, 'Sagasta is our friend. Let us rescue him. Let us

storm the prison!' the thing would have been done. I know this, for I have watched and listened to them."

"And you alone, Lucia," he said admirably, "have had the pluck to try and save me. You are a wonderful girl."

"Try and remember that, my friend," she said, smiling, "next time you launch one of your terrible thunderbolts against my sex."

"I will launch no more," he answered. "I told you once that your sex was incapable of friendship. I retract! You have proved the contrary. I hope that we shall always be friends, Lucia—that nothing will ever come between us."

"Something will come between us, and that something will be your death, if you linger here," she interrupted quickly. "But first I require a promise from you, the price of your freedom."

"Well?"

"I cannot stay your hand in whatever you may choose to do politically. That is a matter in which I do not interfere. But if there is a rising of the people, and you are engaged in it, I ask you now that the lives of my father and mother shall be preserved. It would be better perhaps if I made you promise to leave the country, but I am not asking that. It is only folly to interfere with destiny, and I believe that you are destined to lead a revolution here."

"The better things," he said, "must in the end prevail, and the days of corrupt government, even in such an out-of-the-way spot as this, are numbered. For the lives of your people I pledge my own. I cannot do more."

He flung the cloak over his shoulders, and they moved to the door. There was no one about, but the jailer's steady tramp could be heard close at hand. Sagasta walked boldly away down the dimly-lit passage, and Lucia, locking the door behind her, slipped down another corridor and into the governor's apartments.

CHAPTER XII

THE WARNING GUN

ALL night long San Martina was in a state of suppressed uproar. Dene, when he returned to the hotel, found it packed with people, and the very walls of the place shook with the mingled clamour of revelry and excited speeches. The hall was blocked with men shouting their orders ; they were sitting upon the banisters, overturned cases, even upon the stairs to the topmost flight. The waiters, sworn at and threatened whenever they appeared with their trays upon their heads, were making only feeble efforts to cope with this invasion. Dene, who had just returned from the Presidency, stood for a moment looking upon the scene in wonderment. Then, realising the impossibility of reaching his room, and the further impossibility of sleep if ever he should reach it, he stepped back again into the street almost unnoticed.

The hotel had become for the moment the headquarters of the malcontents, and outside, the crowd in the Place was thinning fast. Dene lit his pipe and strolled aimlessly along. Then a breath of sea air and a vision of twinkling lights set in a black gulf directed his footsteps. He turned to the

left and climbed the hill of San Martina, on the top of which stood the fort and prison.

Soon he reached a little iron seat, with several of which a former President had adorned the crest of the hill. He sat down and relit his pipe, which had gone out during the ascent. Below him on his right the lights of uneasy San Martina flared up to the deep, soft sky ; in front was the ocean ; above the sullen, grim-looking prison, casting a long, frowning shadow downwards. Dene drew a little sigh of relief. He had found a spot where he could be alone for a few moments and think over calmly the events of a day which had certainly been one of the most momentous of his life.

For now that he had actually parted with the money for Beau Desir, and committed himself to this one spot on the earth for the carrying out of his experiment, he began to see that he had done a somewhat unwise and certainly a hasty thing. When he had been in San Martina before there had been no signs of a political crisis ; the little state indeed had appeared to him, so far as he could judge, to be in a sound and prosperous condition. He had formed his conclusions too hastily. Yet, after all, had he so much to fear? Beau Desir was well outside the feverish influences of a rebellion if one should take place. He could scarcely be dragged into it ; and it was very unlikely that the conquering party would seek to dispossess him. There was a British consul within a few days' journey. It could be the policy of no one to make enemies of him and his men. Only he must do his best to be away before the flame was kindled. The wisest course for him was to leave San

Martina at daybreak with such of his possessions as were unshipped, and let the other things follow. . . .

What a change in her appearance when she was not peevish or frowning. Dene wondered whether he had ever seen a more beautiful face than the one which was smiling at him through the clouds of his tobacco smoke. His thoughts had suddenly taken an abrupt turn. He was back again in the Presidency talking to Lucia. Her absolute frankness and sincerity had appealed to him ; she was a wonderfully picturesque figure in his memory. The delicious coquettishness which seemed to be a part of her cosmopolitanism, the legacy of what was French in her mother and what was Spanish in her father, gave her a certain airy, delicate charm which no other woman whom he had ever met had possessed in the least degree. She stood quite alone ; there was no one with whom he could compare her. When he thought of her in the conservatory, with the lights gleaming on her dark, burnished hair and her wonderful eyes raised to his, he was conscious that the memory brought with it a distinct and curiously pleasant thrill.

Suddenly he was recalled from a train of thought which was not without its own peculiar fascinations to the grim and uninteresting present. He pulled himself together and turned round with a start. He had heard nothing, but he had received a swift and strong impression that he was not alone. To his amazement he found a stranger was sharing his seat. A man in a long military coat, whose approach must have been absolutely noiseless and who must further have come from the summit of the hill and

not from the town, was sitting on the other corner of the bench.

The new-comer turned his head at Dene's movement. His cloak and a peaked-hat, worn over his forehead, concealed most of his face ; but from the first Dene felt some instinct of recognition. When he spoke the instinct became a certainty.

"Gregory Dene, by the shades of Alma Mater !" the new-comer exclaimed.

"Sagasta !" Dene replied, in blank wonderment. "Why, I thought that you were in prison !"

"So I was, twenty minutes ago. I have just escaped !"

"Bravo !" Dene said, still a little dazed. "Tell me how you managed it. But are you safe so near ? Why don't you get into the town and hide ?"

Sagasta paused to light a cigarette.

"When they discover," he said, "that I have given them the slip they will fire a gun. I shall have plenty of time when I hear that to get into the town. I paused here to reflect. I am not sure what to do."

"The whole place," Dene said, "is in a most excited state. The shops are barricaded and the standing army is drawn up around the Presidency. The people here are the most excitable I ever saw in all my life."

"And that rascal, the President ?"

"I have been dining with him this evening," Dene answered, with a smile. "He is in perfect health, and apparently excellent spirits. He professes to have no anxiety for the future, but I fancy that he is reckoning upon your early decease."

Sagasta knocked the ash from his cigarette, and replacing it in his mouth, folded his arms and leaned back.

"I am pausing here," he said, "because I am not quite sure whether destiny may not have something more in store for me than to become President of San Martina, and to build up in the future a model state. If I show myself in the town below, the thing is settled. I cannot escape from it. The people are all with me and half the military. The revolution would not last an hour. There are half a dozen whom I should hang—otherwise it would be bloodless. But then, I have to ask myself this question: is it worth while? After all, I am chiefly a theorist. As a practical man I might be a failure; and in any case it would bore me terribly."

"The old Sagasta!" Dene murmured.

"I should have to work hard, and to meet with disappointments," Sagasta continued. "I should meet with ingratitude and with crass stupidity. I should have to imbue with a sense of morality and order a people who do not possess either. Probably I should become in a month as unpopular as Rimarez, which would be a great blow to my vanity, besides placing me in a somewhat painful position."

"I speak," Dene remarked, "as a man wholly ignorant of such matters, but I detest force as a factor in any readjustment of things. Cannot you work politically?"

"Not," Sagasta answered drily, "in San Martina. I have tried that, and I have narrowly escaped hanging. It is a penal offence here to protest against the President paying for his wife's clothes out of the public coffers. The fact is that every one who has any position at all has a dip in,

and I am not at all sure that half my supporters might not expect to be placed in a somewhat similar position if they made me President. I find it hard, Dene, to make up my mind absolutely what to do."

Crack! Whizz! Bang!

Both men turned suddenly round. From the prison above came the dull booming of a gun, followed by the reports of several rifles. They had discovered the escape of the prisoner.

Sagasta sprang to his feet.

"I am for the town," he cried. "There is one man whom I cannot bear to leave alive here. Dene, a word with you. You will see the President and that hound Sanarez! Tell them this from me. If harm comes to the person who set me free, I will hang them both from the flagstaff of the prison before sundown to-morrow."

"When I see them, and if it is necessary," Dene answered, knocking out the ashes of his pipe, "I will not fail to give them your agreeable message!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE CRY OF THE PEOPLE

THE path which led from the prison down into the town curled round and round in corkscrew fashion above the seat on which Dene had been sitting. He stood up and listened. Light, flying footsteps were coming towards him, followed close behind by heavier ones. Wonderfully light footsteps they were for a man's, Dene thought, as he moved a little on one side to let the chase go by him, and listened to their flying beat. It must be a boy who was the fugitive. Nearer and nearer they came; at every stride the pursuer seemed to be gaining ground. The capture would probably take place within a few yards of him. Dene glanced down towards the town. So far all was still. There was no hope for the runaway from there, if his captor felt in the mood for summary vengeance. At that moment Dene was not sure whether he meant to interfere or not.

But, as it happened, that was decided for him in very unexpected fashion. The chase at that moment came in sight. A slim, dark figure came flying round the corner, with uncertain footsteps and evidently failing strength.

Almost immediately behind was a man in uniform, and no sooner had they appeared in sight than the race was over. With a sudden leap forward the pursuing man threw his arm around the neck of his quarry. They came to an abrupt and breathless standstill within a few feet of Dene. He could see them both distinctly in the faint moonlight. The captured man wore the uniform of an officer in the army of San Martina, and at first glance Dene had no doubt whatever but that it was Eugène Rimarez. The man in whose grasp he was appeared to be one of the sentries from the prison. The two looked at one another, panting and speechless, the sentry with blank amazement, his prisoner with face which seemed ablaze with passion, and with a frown which reminded Dene wonderfully of Lucia's.

"You beast! How dare you touch me! Take your hands away!"

The sentry looked more and more mystified. Slowly his hand went up to the military salute.

"The Senor Capitan must forgive," he began; "but it was my duty. It was surely the Senor Capitan who has just paid Sagasta a visit, and he must know that the prisoner had escaped. It was all most unaccountable, most mysterious——"

The man broke suddenly off in the string of his apologies. He took a quick step nearer to the prisoner whom he had a moment before released, and as though by accident knocked his cap off. Then he burst out laughing, for Lucia's dark hair, suddenly escaped from its bonds, fell about her shoulders.

"By the Holy Saints!" he cried, "it's a girl, and a

beauty too! Come, come! No temper! The game is up, little one. You must return with me, but you shall be well treated. Oh, never fear that, for I will look after you myself. Santa Maria! but what eyes! Come, just one kiss; it is well to be friends with your jailer, little one, and if you are reasonable—well, who knows!”

He made an effort to embrace her, but stopped short with a cry of pain. Lucia had struck him across the cheek with all the strength of her outstretched palm, and her diamond rings had cut into his flesh.

“You beast!” she exclaimed passionately. “Let me alone!”

The man recovered himself, and before she could escape she was in his arms.

“You shall repay me many times for that blow, dear little one,” he said mockingly, “many times indeed. Come, I will have a few kisses to start with. Just to whet the appetite, you understand. I must be quick, too, for soon my comrades will be here, and they will demand a share. But first come first served. This is—Holy Maria!”

He went over like a log, inert and lifeless. Dene stood between them, cool but angry. Lucia recognised him at once and a light broke across her face.

“You!” she exclaimed, with a breathless little sob of relief. “You! Oh, what fortune! You will protect me!”

She clasped her hands around his arm, and then suddenly she remembered. Her cheeks became scarlet. Dene looked at her half in amusement, half in pity.

“You are quite safe now,” he said. “I will see to that.

I suppose it was you who helped Sagasta to escape. He is safe in the town by now."

He glanced toward the man who lay groaning upon the ground ; but Lucia dragged him away.

"Come," she cried, "come ! There are more of them behind. We have but a few minutes to escape."

"The man may die," Dene said, lingering still. "I hit him hard. I spoke first, but he did not hear, and I was angry."

"If he dies," she exclaimed scornfully, "what matter ? He is only a half-breed. If I had had the strength or a weapon I would have killed him myself."

Dene looked at her a little gravely. It was the first suggestion of kinship with her father which had escaped her. After all, then, there was fierce blood there. Yet above them he could hear distant voices, and it was not safe to linger. He turned and followed her down the hill.

"Can you get back to the Presidency without going through the town?" he asked. "There should be a shorter way."

She nodded.

"Yes. At the turn there we make for the river. The gardens run down to the bank, and I have the key of a little gate. It is not far. Inside there I shall be safe."

"You are a brave girl," he said. "I never dreamed that you were going to use that order yourself."

"I did not choose," she answered, "that Arnold Sagasta should be shot. I know that Eugène betrayed him, and I am bitterly ashamed of my brother. I made up my mind to save him."

Dene sighed.

"I am afraid San Martina is in for some rough times," he said. "Do you hear the shouting. It is Sagasta who has reached the town. He is safe now."

"We deserve rough times," she answered shortly. "If I were one of the people I would not submit to such miserable misgovernment. If I were a man I would be a patriot and a reformer."

"Well, you have done more for them to-night," he said, "than any man could do. You have given them a leader. Do you know that it may mean a revolution against your father?"

"I did only what was right," she answered doggedly. "I would rather see my father deposed and in prison than have him kill an innocent man."

Dene looked at her curiously. Then he made a remark which was unlike himself and of which he repented immediately afterwards.

"Especially an innocent man in whom you are so greatly interested!"

She flashed an angry glance upon him.

"You have no right to assume that, Senor Dene," she exclaimed. "At least I did hope that you would not have misunderstood me. I see that I was mistaken."

"It was a remark which I had no right to make," he declared. "Please forgive me!"

Their eyes met for a moment. She was no longer angry, but a vivid blush burned in her cheeks. She had suddenly remembered her unusual attire.

"At least," she faltered, "do not look at me. I am very uncomfortable, and——"

It was a little sob which checked her speech, but Dene, with an effort, pretended not to notice it. He walked steadily on, and she recovered her composure.

"I wonder," she murmured, "what he will do now that he is free?"

"When I saw him," Dene answered, "he seemed undecided. He spoke of flight, he spoke also of casting in his lot with the patriots. He was just the same as ever—half cynic, half enthusiast. Listen! What is that?"

They both stopped short. A sound of voices, swelling and swelling until it became almost a roar, came travelling up to them. It was one man whose name seemed to have let loose a sudden, wild enthusiasm.

"Sagasta! Sagasta! Sagasta!"

Dene and Lucia exchanged glances quickened into a mutual intelligence.

"He has decided," Dene said. "He has no longer any choice. He cannot draw back. He has declared himself!"

The girl looked thoughtful for a moment. Then she sighed.

"I am very sorry for my poor mother," she said. "She has no nerves, and she will be frightened to death!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE SHOT ACROSS THE SQUARE

THEY were on the outskirts of the town now, and Dene paused. The last turn in the path had brought them suddenly into clear view of all that was passing below. The whole place was in an uproar. Every one was running towards the Square, and the smashing of lamps, the shouting of the people, and the cracking of rifles made up a din which, from where Dene and Lucia stood, was positively deafening.

"How on earth," he said, "am I to get you into the Presidency?"

"Not across the Plaza," she answered, laughing. "Come, and I will show you the way I spoke of."

She turned to the left, and he followed her closely. Soon they reached a high white wall overhung with drooping shrubs. Keeping in its shadow for a few minutes, they came to a small iron gate spiked at the top and solidly built. Lucia took a key from her pocket and unlocked it."

"I am quite safe now," she said. "You had better get back to your hotel as quickly as you can."

He seemed in no great hurry.

"So far as I am concerned," he said, "I am safe anywhere. But how about you. There are your own people to evade."

"I have no fear about that," she answered. "I have an excellent plan for reaching my room unobserved. You have been very good indeed to me, Senor Dene. May I give you a little word of advice?"

"It was a very fortunate chance," Dene answered heartily, "which brought it within my power to help you."

"It was very fortunate for me," she declared. "I want you to do what I know is the wisest thing. Leave San Martina to-night. Go straight to your home at Beau Desir. Have nothing whatever to do with the quarrels of this wretched place. Do not let Sagasta persuade you into helping him, and, Senor Dene, above all things, do not let my father keep you here. Their miserable squabbling has nothing to do with you. If you linger here you will be dragged into it. Oh, I know you will. They will contrive it somehow!"

He looked at her searchingly.

"You would not have me join Sagasta then?"

"Certainly not," she answered promptly. "You would have nothing to gain by it, and you might lose your property, perhaps your life. Goodbye!"

She held out her hand, a little shyly, and lifted her dark eyes to his. They were very soft and very bright. A long cloak, which she had evidently left behind one of the shrubs before starting on her excursion, covered her now from head to foot. She folded it around her with a sigh

of relief. There was nothing to remind her any more of her unusual attire.

"Goodbye," he said. "You are very good to think of me. I believe you are quite right. The best thing I can do is to get away to Beau Desir. You at least will be in no danger. Sagasta will see to that!"

She snatched her hand away from him; the old frown darkened her face. Her black eyes, which flashed into his for a moment, were lit with passionate reproach. She was gone before he could ask himself the reason of this sudden change in her. He looked after her wondering. Already she was out of sight down one of the winding paths. He turned away towards the town.

"She is a strange girl," he said to himself softly as he stopped to light a cigar. "I wonder how I could have offended her."

He had scarcely taken a dozen steps when he became aware of a most remarkable change in the aspect of affairs. A sudden breathless and portentous calm hung over the town, a silence which, following so closely upon the babel and uproar of a few minutes before, was in a sense gruesome. Every now and then there was the sharp crack of a rifle, but the tumult of voices and the sound of the moving throngs of people had ceased. When at last he came to the Plaza he could scarcely believe his eyes. There was not a soul in sight. The great empty space and the stillness were curiously ominous. Here and there across the Square lay the bodies of dead men—close to him, propped up against the railing with ghastly face and blood still trickling from a wound in the forehead, was the corpse of

one of the President's bodyguard. Dene shuddered as he met the fixed hideous stare of the unseeing eyes.

He started to cross the Plaza obliquely, making his way towards the hotel. Suddenly a warning cry from one of the windows caused him to start, and immediately afterwards a bullet whistled past his ear. It seemed as though that slight movement had saved his life. For a moment he stood perfectly motionless, then he turned and looked in the direction from whence it had come. He understood at once the reason for this strange stillness. The north end of the Square was occupied by a solid phalanx of soldiers, and it was from there that the shot had come. The townspeople had all retired within their doors; they were waiting for orders from Sagasta. Dene, who was in a towering rage, turned round and walked straight up to where the moonlight fell upon the gleaming rifles of the President's bodyguard.

Eugène Rimarez was there talking earnestly with several of the officers. When he saw Dene his face darkened. He greeted him with scant civility.

"Do you know," Dene said, "that I was fired upon by one of your men a minute ago as I was crossing the Square?"

Captain Rimarez twirled his black moustache.

"You are mistaken," he declared coolly. "The shot was fired by one of these drunken rebels. My men would not fire without orders, and none have been given."

"The shot came from here," Dene persisted. "If you doubt me, examine your men's rifles."

Captain Rimarez turned upon his heel.

"We have no time," he said. "Take my advice, Senor Dene, and get back to your hotel, or better still to Beau Desir, at once. If you linger around here you will learn to think less of a chance shot or two. There is going to be some warm work before these devils have had all they deserve."

"There is going to be some d——d butchery," Dene answered warmly. "You know quite well that one of your men fired at me, Captain Rimarez. I shall report the matter to the President."

Dene walked away uneasy, even alarmed. Circumstances seemed to be conspiring to drive him into sympathy with Sagasta and the townspeople. He knew quite well that he was an easy mark for any of their rifles as he passed along the pavement, but not a shot was fired. The hotel door stood open as usual. He walked into the hall and looked around. Almost as he crossed the threshold he was covered by a dozen revolvers.

He stood quite still, thinking that it was perhaps his wisest course. Then he heard a voice from the stairs.

"It is the Englishman, Gregory Dene of Beau Desir. Let him pass. He is a friend!"

Instantly every revolver was lowered. The babel of conversation was resumed. To Dene's surprise the ordinary business of the hotel was scarcely interrupted. Waiters were rushing about with trays full of glasses, men were sitting or standing everywhere, drinking and smoking. To all appearance a revolt in San Martina was an everyday occurrence. Only, piled up against the wall, was a heap of rifles, and in place of the white linen coats and trousers

which was the usual costume of the men of San Martina, every one was clad in dark coloured clothes and wore cartridge belts. Dene passed unchallenged up the stairs and entered his room.

Nothing apparently had been disturbed, only throughout the upper portion of the hotel reigned a profound silence. He walked immediately to the partition which separated Ternissa Denison's room from his and listened intently. There was no sound. After a while he knocked upon the wooden wall, softly at first and then louder. Still no answer. He left the room and tried the handle of her door. It opened without difficulty, and he stood upon the threshold. The room was in darkness. He struck a match and held it over his head. She was not there.

He stepped back into the passage and remained there for a moment or two thinking. The momentary glimpse which he had had into her room showed all the signs of a hurried departure. Articles of wearing apparel were all scattered about, her trunk was open, and her dressing-case lay overturned upon the floor. Dene descended the stairs again, and after some trouble discovered the proprietor of the hotel, who had locked himself in one of the back rooms, and who was in a state of hopeless panic. Dene plied him with questions, but the man rambled on incoherently. He was simply prostrate with fear.

"Ah, it was a terrible country this! If only the great country of the Senor would send a warship. For all of them it was bloodshed, for him it was ruin also. They were drinking his dollars away like water; and for payment—well, who could compel them? The demoiselle?

Ah, he knew nothing. It was true that he told her to leave—the order came from the President, so what could he do but obey? She had gone. Doubtless yes. Had she paid her bill? No. But what was it? A bagatelle. Meanwhile Sagasta and those terrible men were drinking his dollars dry. It was champagne—champagne of the best which they were ordering so freely; champagne which as he lived, a poor man but honest, had cost him thirty dollars a dozen—and they were drinking it like water, and for payment—well——”

Dene stopped him firmly.

“I am not interested in you or your losses,” he said. “I am interested only in the young English lady who was staying here. Did any one in the hotel see her go out?”

“I myself, Senor,” cried a feminine voice. Dene looked around. It was the wife of the wretched little man who was cowering before him. She had just come in from the bar, her face flushed and her bosom heaving. She fanned herself vigorously as she spoke, and cast every now and then glances of furious contempt at her abject spouse.

“I saw her, Senor. It was before the firing commenced, and that coward,” she shook her fan threateningly at him, “had shut himself up. Imagine it, Senor! To be married to such a creature, such a hound, a rascal so beneath contempt.” It was she, a woman, who had to face the furious men and serve them. Pay. Of course they would pay fast enough if one were only firm. But to think that it was she who had had to deal with them alone. Well, they were men of gallantry, brave men all of them, and as

for Senor Sagasta, well, if her husband was not enough to protect her——

Dene broke in at last with difficulty upon what had threatened to develop into a domestic storm of the first water, and succeeded in bringing the lady back to the point. Yes, she could tell him of the Senorita. It was when the news of the escape of Sagasta reached the town; the people were shouting and Sagasta himself was in their midst. She had come then to her, the wretched wife of that cur, and in one great tremble had cried out to know if it were true that Sagasta were free. "And when I told her that, thanks be to all the Saints," the lady continued, "that brave man had escaped, she clasped her hands and shed tears of joy—I myself saw her. She left the hotel a few minutes later, and brought in a man from the street who carried away some luggage for her. Since then, I know nothing."

Dene waited to hear no more. He thanked madame with scant courtesy, and ascended into the hall of the hotel. Here he came face to face with Sagasta, who greeted him with a little cry of triumph. '

"The very man we want," he cried. "Who better, friends, than Gregory Dene, the Englishman?"

CHAPTER XV

AN AMBASSADOR

DENE stopped short. He was not in a very amiable temper.

"What do you want with me?" he asked. "I tell you plainly that I intend to have nothing whatever to do with affairs here. I am off to Beau Desir at once."

"In an hour," Sagasta said, "you can go to Beau Desir or anywhere else you like. But before you start we want you to take a message from us to President Rimarez."

"I'll be shot if I do," Dene exclaimed heartily.

"You need not fear," Sagasta continued coolly, "that you will commit yourself in any way by doing so. As a matter of fact the President is a man of such uncertain temper that it would not be safe for us to send an envoy at all from amongst our own party. He would probably refuse to recognise our status as belligerents, and hang our messenger. What we require is a neutral person of reasonable intelligence, and you, my dear Dene, are the only being in the city who thoroughly fulfils such conditions."

"It is no affair of mine," Dene said shortly. "I am sick of the place and its squabbles, and this wretched

bloodshed. I am going back to Beau Desir, and I am going to stay there."

"You are going back," Sagasta said, "in an hour's time if you like, but you will go to the President first. Listen. If you do not go I must give the signal for the rising, for they are bringing up guns to bombard us. If I do that, San Martina will be in flames in an hour, and this matter will be fought out to the death. The lives of hundreds will lie at your door."

Dene was silent for a moment. There was reason in what Sagasta was saying.

"What is the message," he asked, "which you wish me to take?"

"The conditions of our disarmament," Sagasta answered. "My liberty is one; the publication of State accounts and revision of taxation the next. The others are trifles. We ask nothing which any decently conducted government in the world would not grant as a matter of course."

"I will take the letter," Dene said shortly, "but it must be clearly understood that my doing so does not commit me to any partisanship in the matter. I am entirely neutral."

"We admit that," Sagasta answered. "As a matter of fact, it is your lack of sympathy with either side which so admirably qualifies you to be our representative. You will neither be shot or bribed. Here is the letter."

Dene took it and left the hotel at once amongst a little chorus of cheers. With a white flag which some one had thrust into his hand he crossed the Plaza towards the Presidency.

The night had passed now, and a peculiar violet light in the sky seemed to have come like an interlude between the darkness and the dawn. A few of the electric lamps were still burning with a sad ghostly flicker, but the fronts of the white houses were all wrapped in shadows. A faint salt breeze came stealing in from the harbour, and as Dene passed the little enclosed space in the centre of the Square where a plantation of tropical shrubs surrounded a tall fountain, a heavy sweet odour of musk and orange flowers came floating out to him.

In a few moments he was at the Presidency. From the street it presented a brilliant appearance, for it was lit up from the long line of windows on the ground floor to the third storey, and a double row of guards challenged Dene as he approached. Colonel Sanarez, however, who was in command, recognised him and held up his hand.

"Senor Dene!" he exclaimed in a tone of surprise. "Is it indeed you? Do I understand from that flag that you are an emissary from the rebels?"

Dene assented curtly.

"Something of the sort, I suppose," he answered. "I wish it to be understood that I am strictly neutral so far as regards this rising, but Sagasta is a countryman of mine, and he has induced me to become the bearer of a letter to the President. Can I see him?"

"You can see him, certainly, Senor Dene," the Colonel answered gravely. "Without doubt you can see him, but whether he will accept any communication from the rebels or not, I do not know. Will you come this way?"

Once more Dene entered the Presidency, and was shown

into the room where only a few hours ago he had paid over the money which had made him master of Beau Desir. The President was seated there in earnest consultation with Mopez, his Secretary, and several others who were unknown to Dene. He had changed his clothes for a military uniform, and his sword and revolver lay upon the table before him. Through the high window on his left hand, from which the curtain and mosquito netting had been swept away, he commanded a perfect view of the whole city.

He received Dene amiably, but with surprise, and listened carefully to his explanation.

"Sagasta," he remarked, "was certainly well advised. If he or any of his known abettors had ventured here under cover of a flag of truce, I should have had them shot in the courtyard."

"Wouldn't that be rather summary treatment?" Dene remarked.

"It would be the treatment which all rebels merit," President Rimarez answered calmly. "However, since the letter is here, and especially since you, Senor Dene, have been its bearer, we may as well see what it is that they propose."

He tore open the envelope, and as he read his face grew black with anger. When he had finished the first page he looked up at Dene.

"You have some idea, perhaps, as to the contents of this precious epistle?" he asked searchingly.

"Only the vaguest," Dene answered, "Sagasta would perhaps have told me, but I did not wish to know. I am not interested. The affair does not concern me."

The President read on with darkening face. When he had finished he handed the letter to Mopez to read, and leaving his seat, began to pace up and down the room, wrapped in thought.

"I would give," he said, "a thousand dollars to know who it was that set free this pestilence. There are absurd rumours that it was some one disguised in Eugène's uniform."

"It was," Dene remarked, "a plucky rescue."

"Plucky or not," the President answered savagely, "if I discover the rescuer he will have short shift."

Dene turned away to hide the smile at his lips. If only the President could know who had done him this evil turn—that it was Lucia, his carefully chaperoned and beautiful young daughter, who had planned and carried out this thing which not one of Sagasta's friends in the city had had the wit or the pluck to attempt!

There was a short conversation carried on in whispers between the President and his little council. Then the former turned to Dene, who had discreetly withdrawn to the window and was watching the daybreak.

"Senor Dene," he said, "you will do us the favour of taking back to those who entrusted you with this letter a verbal message. Tell them this—that my whole council of the State of San Martina has been summoned to meet this day at noon. Let Arnold Sagasta and his friends present themselves as peaceful citizens before us, and make known their desires, and I give you my word that they shall be carefully considered. But, in the meantime, let him understand this—that any gathering together whatsoever of the

people or any indications of an attempted gathering will be considered as an act of war, and my troops, whose rifles now are charged with ball cartridges, have orders to disperse such at once and at all costs. They must come to us unarmed, and as peaceful citizens. At eight o'clock this morning I shall expect the stores and public places of the city open. I will not have this barricading and skulking behind closed doors. Can I trust to your memory, *Senor Dene*, to convey this to *Sagasta*?"

"Certainly," *Dene* answered. "Of course, if I were an emissary from them I should require some pledge or safe conduct for them. As, however, that is a position which I naturally declined to occupy, I shall simply repeat your message without comment."

The President took him by the arm.

"This way, *Dene*," he said. "I will let you out by my private door, for there is just another word I want to have with you."

He led the way down a long corridor and out into the cool dawn-lit gardens. They crossed the turf, and stood together in the shadow of the high wall.

"*Senor Dene*," the President said earnestly, "I am going to offer you some excellent advice which I trust you will not hesitate to take. You are a man of common sense, I know. Good. I need say no more. In an hour it will be sunrise. Before then I want you to be on your way to *Beau Desir*."

Dene smiled.

"It is strange," he said, "but it is advice which has been given to me before, not many hours ago. I can assure you

that I have no wish to linger in San Martina. I should have been out of the city before now, but for my errand here."

The President held out his hand.

"You have proved yourself," he said solemnly, "a man of sense. Do not misunderstand me. This little affair will be over in a week, and all will be quiet again. But until then you are better out of the way. Afterwards you will be a very welcome guest here whenever you choose. Beau Desir is not far away. My wife and daughter will be charmed to see you whenever you feel disposed to give us the honour of your company."

Dene bowed his acknowledgments, and took advantage of the opportunity to satisfy himself concerning Lucia.

"I trust," he said, "that neither of the ladies have been alarmed by the disturbance in the town."

The President glanced upwards. At two of the windows looking over the gardens lights were still burning.

"I am afraid," he said, "that they have had sleepless nights. Lucia is so sensitive—over-sensitive almost. There are times, Senor Dene, when I am sorry that I brought her from Paris. But come, I am going to let you out this way."

They approached a little door let into the wall. The President felt in his pocket and gave vent to a little exclamation of annoyance.

"The key," he said, "is in my other pocket. If you will wait here for a moment, Senor Dene, I will fetch it."

He hastened away, and Dene stood alone. The breeze from the sea had grown stronger. The tops of the tall

shrubs were gently bowed, there was a faint soft rustling of leaves, all around him the air was heavy with languorous tropical perfumes. Then something prompted him suddenly to glance upwards at the nearer of those two windows to which the President had pointed. Almost as he raised his eyes the light was extinguished, a white arm was slowly extended, and something came fluttering down to his feet. He stooped and picked it up hurriedly, It was a soft piece of yellow ribbon tied around a scarlet rose.

CHAPTER XVI

BEAU DESIR

"**H** EAVEN be praised ! It is the wind of night !"
"Santa Maria ! How good !"

"Ah. How sweet ! How fresh !"

"Phew ! At last she comes !"

A little group of men in picturesque undress moved slowly from the shadow of the long wooden barn, against which they had been leaning, out on to the edge of the great open plain, and turned their faces to the chain of mountains which towered over their heads westward. Through the mighty cleft which split the mountain from peak to base, deep, narrow, fringed with hanging pine-trees, came sweeping in that nightly wind from the sea beyond which followed ever upon the sundown as regularly as the tinkling of the little bell from the mission chapel announced the hour of evensong. The murmur of voices reached the loiterers within their homes or stretched in some lazy corner enjoying the luxury of rest and gossip and countless cigarettes. The little settlement of brown wooden houses became suddenly alive. Men came out into the open ; the women, dark-haired and dark-skinned

most of them, with children in their arms and at their skirts, leaned over their wooden piazzas and cooled their heated faces. A fire of cheerful greetings and neighbourly remarks broke in upon the silence which the last hour of tropical heat had set like a seal upon their lips. They were a motley community — mostly English, but with a sprinkling of Brazilians, Portuguese, half-breeds, a few Chinese, and here and there a dark-eyed Spaniard and Cuban. The sound of their conversation was like the babel of many tongues ; their costume varied from the sombrero and riding-breeches of the cowboy to the white ducks and planter's hat of John Angus, the overseer. Between them and the high enclosing wall of mountains was a sea of gold, a great ocean of deep-yellow corn, higher than the heads of the tallest of them, with ears full almost to the bursting ; and with that breath of wind which came first in little puffs and then in a long, grateful sweep, the murmur of their nightly music came to the ears of the little colony. It was a rustle at first, scarcely more, growing at each vibration sweeter and more melodious, until the tall stalks were bent in long, rippling waves, and the rustling became like the *Vox Humana* of a cathedral organ. The dwellers in the valley of Beau Desir had grown to look upon that nightly melody as the signal for the hour of their recreation — the air was suddenly filled with laughter, the babel of mingled tongues grew louder. The younger ones told stories, chaffed and made love ; the elders talked in little groups of the mighty task before them, and of the expected return of Gregory Dene, their master and yet their voluntary equal, the owner of Beau Desir.

For these were great days in the valley of Beau Desir—days for strenuous toil from early morn until the darkness fell, for toil even through the great heat of the Southern noon. All day long the deep silence of the place had been broken by the whirl of machinery ; far away across the yellow plain men like insects had been crawling slowly along, and whirling blades, flashing like silver in the sunlight, had lain low the great cornstalks in a long level line. These were great days indeed, these days of harvest for the dwellers in the valley of Beau Desir. Thousands of miles away the two giant powers of the world, labour and capital, had already closed in the grim struggle for life or death. Here the great principle for which they fought, the heart's desire of the toiler, the jest of the capitalist, was already a thing established and flourishing. The fruit of his labour was the measure of the man's reward. Here communism, or whatever fancy name the world might choose to give it, was something more than an empty name. Every man and woman had something to hope for from the crops. Prosperity to John Angus, the overseer, meant the sending home for his sister, whose heart was breaking with the struggle for life amongst the stones of Scotland. It meant that Pietro, the Portuguese, the olive-skinned hard-working tender of the cattle, would be married to Maria, daughter of old Juan Velitga, the horse doctor ; that Ralph Morrison, the engineer whose skill kept in order the whole machinery of the little place—Ralph, who had come here a dying man from a Yorkshire furnace and was now a great strapping fellow with bronzed cheeks and giant shoulders, would send home for his pallid, heartsick brother, fighting

with despair amongst the gloom and sorrows of a dreary manufacturing town, that he, too, might breathe the air of freedom, might reckon himself no longer a purposeless unit, a mere link in the chain which held together the great wealth of the unwholesomely rich, but a man, a creature of God's making, whose limbs and brain were his own to use for the common good and his own freedom. And all these things were good for the dwellers in Beau Desir. It made joyous men and women of them. It led them to watch the result of their toil with kindling eyes and eager hearts. It made self-respecting, intelligent creatures of them—of many divers races and nationalities it taught them all the great laws of brotherhood and good-fellowship. As they worked they sang, and laughter was a thing good to hear amongst them. What matter though the sweat poured from their faces? though their hands were hard, and their cheeks as brown as autumn leaves? They worked for their homes and their women and their children—and such work is the poetry of labour.

Tinkle! tinkle! tinkle! Ping! ping! ping!

Pietro was out leaning against the palisading with his guitar, and they all stopped to listen.

“Cara Melita! (Tinkle! tinkle! tinkle! Ping! ping!

ping!)

Mia Sposa! (Tinkle, tinkle, ping!)

Cara! cara!

Mia Sposa! (Tinkle, tinkle, ping! ”

Clear and fresh as a lad's the man's voice rang out upon the slowly gathering dusk. The talk was hushed, the

listeners gathered in a circle. Pietro passed on from verse to verse without hesitation, always with the same refrain.

“ Cara Melita !

Mia Sposa !

Cara ! cara !

Mia Sposa ! ”

(Tinkle, tinkle, tinkle ! Ping, ping, ping !)

Down went the guitar ! Bravos were many. “ Encore ! ” shouted an enthusiastic Frenchman. But Pietro laughed, showing all his white teeth, and lit a cigarette. No more just now. He would sing for them another time. Meanwhile there was Morrison with his violin—he would play for the asking !

Pietro had been riding far and had scarcely spoken to his Melita all day. He leaned over the wooden fence whispering to the dark-haired girl who had come shyly out from the next house at the sound of his voice. Pietro could make love as well as sing. The music of their Southern voices raised scarcely above a whisper was almost as sweet as the words of his song. For after the harvest there was to be a wedding, and the love-light in Maria's dark eyes, raised only now and then to his, was a very fair thing to see, and Pietro counted himself a lucky fellow indeed. One, two, three weeks from the Senor's return—it need be no longer than that ; and only yesterday had come the news that the Senor was actually in San Martina unloading his stores. He had arrived, he might be with them at any moment. What happiness. Pietro talked proudly of the little house which his own hands had built and fashioned, and of the scarlet

creepers which he had brought down that day from the mountains ; how well the blossoms would look in her glossy hair—such beautiful hair! Pietro was a foolish fellow. But it was all very pleasant to listen to.

Suddenly a clear far-away sound broke in upon the musical murmurings of cheerful voices and languid laughter. There was a puff of white smoke high up on the mountain's side—the thousand rolling echoes of a single rifle-shot came travelling down to them. For a few moments there was breathless silence—then every one began to speak at once. A second and a third report followed quickly after; a little cloud of white smoke floated out across the dark background of the pine-clad pass. Then there was a ringing shout of joy.

“ Hurrah ! Hurrah ! ”

“ It is the master ! ”

“ The Senor, the Senor ! ”

“ Hurrah ! Hurrah ! Hip, hip, hip, hurrah ! ”

CHAPTER XVII

A STRANGER FROM THE MOUNTAINS

THE light merriment of the evening had suddenly become a pandemonium of joy. There were cheers from the men and exclamations of shrill delight from the women. It was the master who was coming. All was well with him, then. Out they trooped one and all along the winding road, with their faces turned upwards towards the pass. There was much shouting and much straining of the eyes, for the twilight passed swiftly into darkness at Beau Desir. In the midst of it all the door of the school-house opened and a woman came slowly out.

It was a long wooden building, embosomed with flowers and creepers which, springing up from the ground, wound themselves round the rude supports of the Piazza and reached even to the roof. It was roughly built of untrimmed logs hewn from the mountain's side, whose crest was black with pines, and the fresh resinous odour still lingered about the place, more aromatic yet fainter than the perfume of the roses. Within were rows of bare forms, a carpetless floor, copybooks and a blackboard — in the doorway Ternissa Denison!

The shouts of the children not so long ago dismissed

were fast dying away in the distance as they made their way—ignoring on this particular evening the settlement playground—to where all the men and a great many of the women were assembling. The woman who lingered in the porch of the schoolhouse was almost the only living person who had not hastened to join one or other of those distant groups.

She hesitated for a moment, then she advanced to the paling which, after the English fashion, enclosed a little scrap of garden, and took up her stand there. Opposite was another building very similar to the schoolhouse, but with a little iron bell fixed upon the roof. It was the mission chapel, and in a moment or two a tall, spare man, wearing a garment which might possibly once have been a cassock, came leisurely out, locked up the door, and stopped outside to light a cigarette.

She leaned over and spoke to him timidly.

"Is it true what they are saying, sir?" she asked. "Is this the owner of Beau Desir who is coming back?"

He stopped short and doffed his hat. His face was dark and furrowed, and on one side was the scar of what seemed to have been a sabre cut. His appearance was in every way the reverse of sacerdotal. Nevertheless his smile and his voice were alike pleasant.

"Good evening, schoolmistress," he said. "Your little cottage has been empty so long that I have ceased to glance even towards it. Yes, it is Gregory Dene whom they are all expecting. The rifle-shot was the signal by means of which Muria, who keeps the pass, agreed to let us know of his arrival."

The distant clamour of joyous voices were still unabated. The woman and her companion alone were silent. The woman was very pale.

"They are glad indeed," she murmured. "How they love him."

"They would be more than commonly ungrateful," he remarked pleasantly, "if they did not. There are not many people who would take the trouble to do for their fellow-creatures what this Englishman has done. He is a man with very fine social ideals. No wonder they are glad to see him. Besides, Angus is a hard taskmaster."

She looked at him curiously.

"Forgive me," she said, "but you also talk like an Englishman."

He was silent for a moment. Then he turned towards her and the smile had left his lips.

"I have no country," he said, "nor any name. I am called here Dom Pedro, and although I belong to no recognised church Gregory Dene has given me permission to play the part of priest here. I do the people no harm, at any rate—and I tell them no lies. Sometimes I think, though, that they only accept me on sufferance—I believe that the women in their hearts would prefer a Romish priest."

"I, at least," she said heartily, "would not, and I shall like to come to your next service. The last time I was in a church—oh, may God keep the memory of it from me!" she burst out passionately.

He came so close that the dusky light hid from him no longer her features. He sighed.

"You have suffered," he said gently. "So have many

who have come here. You are young, and you will forget."

"Never!" she murmured. "The fear of it will remain. It is in my heart always."

"Nevertheless," he repeated, "you are young, and to the young forgetfulness is always possible. You have many years before you—and hope at your age is spelt with letters of gold."

He passed on with a little courteous gesture of leave-taking, and the woman remained looking after him. Her eyes travelled past the little groups of picturesque-looking men and women, and rested upon the distant mountain-side wreathed now in mists and gloom. It was very beautiful still, though the colours had gone—the gold from the corn-fields and the blue from the Andiguas, but she gazed with blind, unseeing eyes. It was one of those rare moments wherein she permitted herself the luxury of thought, and her fancy had carried her back into a world very remote indeed, whose echoes barely even sounded in this little corner of the universe. Only a few hours ago she had drawn the first grey hair from her head, and had noticed with a curious heartache the coming of a very palpable wrinkle. With a sudden thrill of horror she, to whom her beauty had always afforded a sort of delicate pleasure wholly distinct from vanity, realised that she was no longer a girl. She would be thirty years old very soon now. She, to whose lips the cup of life had scarcely been lifted, was growing old. It was passing her by. The tears stood in her eyes as she gazed vacantly at the darkening hills; it seemed to her then that, contrasting her misery with

this universal joyfulness, she was realising more mournfully than ever she had done the bitterness of her lot. For after all she was a woman as other women, fashioned for love and life and joy—nay, she was even more of kin to these things, for she had the rare and wonderful gift of beauty. Even the plain grey dress which she wore—carefully chosen as being the most suited to her new position—could not conceal the elegance of her figure. She was still as lithe and graceful in her movements as in the days when she had made her curtsy at Buckingham Palace, and had held her own amongst the great ladies of her country. Her eyes were still as soft, her hair as fine and silky, and her mouth, that wonderfully seductive and most distracting of her features, had still its old charm, when—as seldom happened now—her lips parted in one of those bewildering smiles. She had been esteemed a beautiful woman in a country of beautiful women, but those days seemed to her now to lie very far back in the past. Of what profit had it all been to her? Behind lay many evil and sorrowful things; the deadly monotony of the present was fast eating its way into her soul. And her future—well, it was of the future she dreaded most to think, for across her path lay for ever that deep, black shadow. She pressed her hands to her temples, and a little moan sobbed its way out into the darkness.

Her solitude was suddenly broken. A man had climbed softly up from a deep gully which yawned a few yards away from her cottage. Seeing her standing there alone he hesitated. He looked cautiously around. There was no one else in sight. He advanced and spoke to her.

"I beg your pardon, but could you tell me——"

At the sound of his voice she turned round and faced him.

Instantly the words died away upon his lips. He drew a quick breath which was almost a sob.

"Ternissa," he cried faintly, "am I dreaming?"

She held out both her hands.

"Arnold!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TEMPTER

THERE was a few moments' breathless silence. Of the two, it was obviously the man who was most surprised. The look on her face became one of silent appeal. Slowly his brows contracted, his face became as black as night. Her hands dropped to her sides.

"You here! In San Martina, Ternissa," he said slowly. "You have come—to him!"

"It is false," she answered passionately. "It is cruel of you to say so. You do not believe it."

"He sent for you."

"I came," she said slowly, "because your life was in danger."

He laughed bitterly.

"My life! Of what account was that to you?"

She sighed.

"Will you never believe that I was duped, shamefully tricked. That——"

He interrupted her.

"I have heard it all," he said, a little more kindly. "In a sense I believe you. Only—the pity of it is so great."

"Every hour in which you have suffered," she murmured, "has been an hour of agony to me."

Then there was another silence. There was so much they both had to say. Through the twilight there floated up to them the strains of a violin and laughing voices. She drew him further back under the shadow of her piazza.

"Have you made your peace with the President?" she asked anxiously. "How is it that you are here?"

His black eyes flashed fiercely. He seemed scarcely able to restrain his anger.

"We have been disgracefully tricked," he said. "San Martina was in my hands. The people were all with me. We were invited, ten of us, to appear before the council and state our grievances under cover of a flag of truce. We did so, and I was the only one who escaped. The other nine were simply butchered, and in our absence the army took the people by surprise and massacred the bravest of them. Oh, President Rimarez has scored this time, but I shall live yet to shoot him like a dog."

"And you——?" she cried.

"I am in hiding with half a dozen others in the mountains. I came here——"

He stopped short.

"Never mind. You had better know nothing. Tell me what you are doing at Beau Desir?"

"I came from England with Gregory Dene," she said. "I am schoolmistress to the children here. It is my first day. Do you know," she continued, "that he and the President are friends? You must not be seen here. It is most unwise. He might give you up."

"Most of the things one does in this world," he answered bitterly, "are unwise."

"It surely is not worth while," she said anxiously, "for you to run any useless risks. It is scarcely dark yet, and every one is about to-night."

"You are not," he remarked, "in a hospitable frame of mind."

She laid her hand upon his arm.

"Don't be unkind, Arnold," she said. "You know that it is for your safety only that I am concerned."

He looked at her searchingly.

"Is that true, Ternissa?"

"You know that it is," she answered.

He continued in a milder tone.

"You can help me—if you will."

"God knows," she murmured, "that the will is there."

"You can help me," he repeated, "more than any one in the world. When is Gregory Dene expected?"

"To-night. Did you not hear the signal from the pass?"

"You must let me have food," he said. "All that you can spare, and you must be on the look out for me at nights. I shall have to come down often."

"I can do that," she murmured.

"My hiding place is inaccessible," he said, "except from this side. If any attempt is made to capture me from here I will teach you how to communicate with me."

"I am ready to learn," she said.

"We want arms," he continued slowly. "Dene is bringing rifles and ammunition for all his men."

"I do not think," she said, "that he will let you have any. I do not think that he will help you in any way."

"I must have them," he declared. "I must have them, if necessary, without his knowledge."

She looked doubtful.

"Remember," she said, "that I am only here on sufferance. Gregory Dene's offer was made—well, he may have repented of it. I shall hate meeting him. I shall hate his surprise when he sees me here."

"You will be able to twist him round your little finger," the man said contemptuously. "He is a crank and a fool."

She shook her head.

"Are you sure of that? The people here do not think so. Neither do I."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"In their hearts," he murmured, "who can say? Their lips speak of his generosity, for he is their benefactor. He gives them the bread they eat, and they lick his fingers for it. But how much does that count for, I wonder? I know this class of people, and I know in how much esteem they hold a philanthropist. They take all he has to give, and they hate him for giving. Depend upon it, Dene is easily befooled. I know him, and I can answer for it."

She sighed a little.

"It is a pity," she said.

"What is a pity?"

"Oh, that there should be any good men at all. It is always they who suffer and are imposed upon."

He looked at her keenly. Would she fail him, he

wondered. There was so much that she could do: her presence here might prove his salvation.

"You are growing cynical, Ternissa."

"There are many things," she answered dreamily, "to account for that."

For a while they were silent. The man leaned over and touched her hand caressingly.

"Ternissa !"

She did not move or draw away her hand. His dark eyes glowed with a new fire. He drew her gently to him.

"What has passed," he murmured, "no one can alter. But there is the future."

She gently disengaged herself from him.

"Yes, there is the future," she repeated. "For God's sake do not remind me of it."

"We are not children," he said. "We are not altogether of the stuff whereof these others are fashioned. You have courage. You have proved it. Whatever the past may have been, the future is ours. Come ! hold out your hands to me. I am not yet a beaten man. With your help I may turn the tables upon Rimarez and his cursed crew."

She looked at him very tenderly. Her eyes were soft with tears.

"And afterwards ?"

"There can only be one afterwards for you and for me," he cried, with a note of passion in his tone. "No human power can keep the wind from the trees, or the waves from beating upon the shore. Our destinies are engraven side by side upon the book of life."

She stood in a silence which was almost trance-like.

Was there indeed something prophetic in his words? He leaned towards her—his hot breath was upon her cheek, and a sudden sense of yielding glided like a sweet narcotic through her veins. Suddenly the whole situation was dissolved. A little murmur of voices swelling at once into shouts and cheers rose from all sides. The whole settlement sprang into life. Ternissa came to herself with a little throb of fear.

"You must go," she whispered hurriedly. "Gregory Dene is coming. Wait one instant under the broken fir there."

She vanished into the house, and reappeared almost immediately with a basket.

"It is all I have," she said. "Quick, the moon is rising and they will see you."

He smiled.

"I have a way of my own up into the mountains," he said. "Some day I will show it to you. I am quite safe. To-morrow or the next night I shall come again."

He glided away, slim, dark and graceful. Even as he turned, the rising moon touched the fringe of pine trees on the mountain's side, and the shouts of welcome woke a hundred echoes in the quiet valley.

CHAPTER XIX

THE COMING OF GREGORY DENE

DENE had arrived, and the evening's idleness was at an end. There were all the packages on the backs of the long train of mules to be examined and carried away into the storehouses, the mules themselves to be fed, Dene's horse to be cared for. Fortunately, the moon had risen up from behind the dark-crested hills, and every moment its light was growing stronger. There was no lack of willing workers. The little open space round which the houses of the settlement had been built was suddenly transformed into a scene of bustle and cheerful energy. Men went backwards and forwards carrying all manner of packages, and a fire of cheerful conversation was flashing all over the place. Dene himself, head and shoulders above them all, moved about with outstretched hand, everywhere welcomed with enthusiasm, hearing all the news of the place, frankly and unaffectedly delighted at the joy which his coming had evoked. There were no complaints, no discordant voices. The horses had done wonderfully ; the harvest—well, never had Beau Desir seen such a one before. He, too, had great tidings for them. A whisper began to creep around that

their dream was realised. A sudden torrent of questions assailed him. He held up his hand, and every one paused in their tasks. Packages were laid down, eager faces were turned towards him. There was intense silence. He was going to speak to them. Every man and woman in the place was there except the schoolmistress, and she, too, was within earshot, standing back amongst the shadows of the verandah, her face turned towards him.

"My friends," he said, "the news which I have brought to you is mostly good. I have succeeded in the object for which I went to England, and I found President Rimarez upon my return last week prepared to conclude the arrangements which I made with him before starting. Beau Desir is ours. I have the charter in my pocket, and the money has been paid."

There was a burst of cheering. They would have crowded around him, but he waved them back. He had something more to say to them.

"My friends," he continued, "this is the pleasant part of my news. What is to follow is not quite such good hearing. The State of San Martina to which we now belong is politically in anything but a satisfactory condition. On the very evening after I had paid the purchase-money and received the charter of Beau Desir a rebellion broke out in the city. For a time, I must confess, the result seemed doubtful. When I left—I came by sea to run no risk of losing my stores—the place was in a state of anarchy. I received tidings yesterday, however, of a more reassuring nature. The rioters were in the end dispersed, and their leader, Sagasta by name, had fled from the city. Of course

it is possible that a new government and President might recognise the charter which has been granted to us, but, on the other hand, they might decide to ignore it. Hence, it becomes not only our duty but our policy to support President Ramirez. Neutrality would be, of course, the best position for us, but it is a position which we should find impossible. I want to prepare you for all this. It is possible that we may have to fight for our homes. If so, I know that you will fight like brave men."

"Will it be with our fists?" asked a quiet voice from the crowd.

Dene smiled.

"Not exactly, Angus," he answered. "I brought out with me from England a cargo of rifles, knowing that they would be very saleable in San Martina and would yield a handsome profit. I had intended to offer them to the government there, but on reflection I decided that the wisest course would be to keep them for ourselves. Accordingly, I brought them down by sea to the other side of the mountains, and they are amongst the goods which you are now unpacking. I propose to form a defence corps from amongst you and to give an hour a day to drill. Let us hope that our preparations will be needless, but I think you will all agree with me that we should not be unprepared."

They cheered him again to the echo. On the whole, the notion of a little fighting was exhilarating. Even the women were not greatly discomposed; it was, after all, a far-off contingency. It would very likely never come to anything. The few moments' seriousness passed away. Laughter and

gaiety reigned again. Once more the little open space was full of bustle and good-humoured activity.

The man who called himself Dom Pedro and John Angus the overseer were standing with Dene, and it was the former who first spoke to him of the latest comer to the settlement. Ternissa, whose eyes had followed them everywhere as they moved about amongst the throng, was conscious of the exact moment when her name was mentioned. She saw Dom Pedro raise his finger and point towards her cottage; she even heard Dene's quick exclamation of surprise. She moved out from the shadows, and the moonlight which had gradually been growing stronger showed her clearly standing in the little strip of garden which had been fenced in around her wooden house. Tall and graceful, with her white-clad figure clearly outlined against the darkness of the house behind, it seemed to Dene that there was something unreal, almost ghostlike, about her unexpected appearance here. He left the two men at once and went hurriedly towards her.

The moment or two during which they stood face to face, during which the man looked at the woman and the woman at the man, was brief enough in actual space of time, yet in themselves they constituted an epoch. For the first time Dene realised how beautiful this woman really was—realised too that he was in some measure drifting beneath the spell of her curiously attractive personality. Her appearance here was sufficiently amazing. He had left her under circumstances which he could only recall with horror. All last night, when they had lain upon the sands waiting for the dawn to continue their journey, he had thought of her,

had seen her white sad face gleaming through the darkness, and had tormented his brain with many purposeless speculations as to the nature of that mystery which undoubtedly surrounded her. And all the time she was at Beau Desir. She had been in such dire straits that she was content to throw in her lot with his little handful of colonists. He was puzzled beyond measure. They stood within a few feet of one another, and Gregory Dene, a man of sound common sense and very deficient in ordinary sentiment, did not fail to realise the psychological importance of that magnetic moment. It was something more than their eyes which had met. They two, the man and the woman, were kin to each other in a very different sense to that which led Dene, a thorough communist in such matters, to speak sometimes of his colonists at Beau Desir as brothers and sisters. Curiously enough, the instinct which told him this was not altogether a pleasant one. He was not in the least in love with her—he did not desire to be. Yet she exercised easily an influence over him that no other woman had ever acquired.

It was she who broke that eloquent silence. She leaned over towards him with a faint smile upon her lips.

"You see," she said, "after all, I have dared to take you at your word. I have come to teach your children for a little while."

"You are very welcome to Beau Desir," he answered.

"It is good of you to offer me a refuge."

"It is very wonderful," he said, looking into her eyes, "that you should care to accept such a one."

"I wanted rest," she murmured, "and absolute solitude.

My short stay in San Martina was like a hideous nightmare to me."

"Beau Desir has not much to offer," he replied, "but I think that we can give you those two things."

She sighed, and looked for a moment thoughtfully at the little crowd of lighthearted men and women who thronged the open space round which the settlement was built, at the dark shapes of their little wooden houses standing out very clearly now in the moonlit air, and away over the rolling plain of golden corn to the hills rising abruptly like a towering wall, shutting them out from the whole outside world. She listened to the clamour of gay voices, to the peals of laughter from the women, the badinage with which the men lightened their tasks.

"I think," she said softly, "that Beau Desir has very much to offer. You have beautiful surroundings, you are free from the evils of cities, your people have every opportunity of leading a natural and a simple life. Happiness is there waiting at their doors. What fortune for them!"

The wistfulness in her tone stirred his heart to fresh pity, but he banished all traces of it from his voice. He spoke to her in a matter-of-fact way.

"Many people," he remarked, "would find it very monotonous."

"Then they would not deserve," she answered dreamily, "ever to know happiness or content."

He smiled at her.

"The minds of many men and women," he said, "are too restless to find happiness in a life without events. Many would consider existence here a life of negations."

She shook her head.

"You have men and women here," she said, "and therefore you must have events. Don't you think that events are evolved? Outside influences are only a secondary factor."

"Psychologically I suppose you are right," he admitted.

"To-night," she continued, "Pietro played his guitar to Marie, and afterwards they walked together to the cornfield to look at what I heard him call the Sea of Gold. What do they want more? Is not their life full enough? They have love. Is not that a great thing?"

CHAPTER XX

THE SENORA HAS PLANS

THE President of San Martina lit an after-breakfast cigar, and stretched himself out in a wicker chair with a little grunt of satisfaction. The meal had been served, as was usual during the hot months, on the balcony of one of the smaller rooms at the back of the Presidential abode. Over his head was an awning; through the fine mosquito netting which waved softly in front of him was a pleasing vista of cool green shrubs and shaded walks; on the horizon a blue haze hung around the Andiguan hills, behind which lay Beau Desir. To judge from the deep quietness, it was very difficult indeed to believe that only a day or two ago a revolution had been raging in this exceedingly well-ordered city. The faint hum of voices which came from the Plaza was far from being of a disturbing nature; the floating cries of the fruit-seller and the ice-man were mingled with the still lighter greetings of the idlers in the Square. The President sipped his liqueur, and being a man used to the ups and downs of life, congratulated himself with admirable philosophy upon being where he was instead of in the cemetery.

It was indeed a domestic scene, and one which should

have pleased the hearts of his people could their eyes have penetrated that thick screen of trees and flowering shrubs which adorned the Presidential garden. They would have had the unspeakable privilege of beholding their ruler in the bosom of his family. Opposite to him sat the Senora, his wife. She wore a pink dressing-gown and slippers not usually seen in such exalted circles beyond the precincts of the bedchamber. Her hair was loosely coiled on the top of her head and secured with a much-bejewelled pin. Her complexion was a little yellow, and seemed to lack that freshness which apparently came with the completion of her toilet. But, as though to atone for these slight defects on the part of her mother, Lucia, as fresh as a rose, occupied the third seat at the table. She wore a plain white muslin gown, and there was a band of white ribbon in her hair. Her complexion suggested a recent acquaintance with the "Paphian Wells," of Aphrodite, and her dark eyes were wonderfully soft and bright. Only the Senora, with the jealous eye of a closely watching mother, detected a listlessness in her manner and a lack of interest in her surroundings which afforded her some concern.

"Lucia, my love," she said, with a sidelong glance at her, "you are thoughtful this morning."

Lucia yawned openly.

"No," she answered, "I am not thoughtful, because there is nothing to think about. I am simply bored."

The Senora smiled, a fat, good-humoured smile.

"It is natural," she said. "The dear girl wants a change. Now that everything is quiet again, Gustave, could we not give a ball?"

The President looked at his cigar thoughtfully.

"I should have liked," he said, "to have shot Sagasta first. But, after all, if you and the child desire it, I think that it would be safe. It would be popular with the townspeople, and the money is in the Exchequer. What does Lucia say?"

Lucia was not in the least enthusiastic. She merely shrugged her shoulders.

"I thought that all the money was required for public works," she remarked. "You tell every one so who comes here."

The President coughed.

"The army," he said, "has been squared. All arrears have been paid up. That was the most important thing."

"And as a consequence," Lucia remarked, "there has not been a sober soldier in San Martina for a week. They have run riot all over the place, and no one has dared to interfere. It would have been better if the army had received their back pay a little at a time."

"You are perhaps right, Lucia," her father agreed, "although the matter is no concern of yours. But what was I to do? They were on the point of mutiny, and without them Sagasta and his rebels could march in here and murder us all without the slightest hindrance."

"Drunken soldiers," Lucia remarked, "are a poor protection."

The President smiled.

"Pardon me," he said, "but you are talking like a child. My soldiers fight better drunk than sober. While we can keep them in good humour we are as safe here as in Paris."

To return to your mother's scheme. I am inclined to think that the suggestion is a good one. The townspeople are a little sullen. They have had property destroyed and trade is bad with them. A ball would provide them with amusement and the majority would profit by it."

"We could send," the Senora remarked, with a glance at Lucia, "for Senor Dene."

The girl's cheeks were certainly flushed. The Senora and her husband exchanged rapid glances.

"He would not come," Lucia said. "I am sure that he would not come."

"On the contrary," the Senora remarked, with an air of mystery, "I am quite sure that he would come."

The girl's cheeks were burning now, but she spoke quite calmly.

"Why should he? I do not believe it."

Again the President and his wife exchanged covert glances. The Senora smiled upon her daughter with amiability.

"At present, little one," she said, "it is not for you to know. But rest assured that he would come. Your father and I know that. Presently we may have something to say to you. But not yet. Be patient."

Lucia said no more, but in a few minutes she moved her chair a little and sat with her face turned from them, looking over the gardens. From where she was now she could see the walk down which they had wandered on his first visit to the Presidency, and beyond the little gate where they had parted after her visit to the prison. Her cheeks grew slowly hot as she thought of that night. What must he think of

her? What could he? And he had seen her in Eugène's clothes. It was horrible. Yet—had he really said anything to her father and mother? She resolved to believe, just for a moment, that he had, and it was wonderful how everything in life seemed to change. The weariness was all gone. She was suddenly glad that she was young. There was so much to enjoy and be thankful for. And all the while she was conscious that she wanted to be alone. She was longing to steal off into her room where the sound of those muffled voices would not reach her, to sit down by the window and think in her favourite corner where she was quite free from any chance of disturbance. It was a very great change this.

Meanwhile the President and his wife were talking almost in a whisper.

"Are you sure," he ventured doubtfully, "that that was wise?"

The Senora shrugged her shoulders. It was done, and it was doubtless for the best.

"You know Lucia," she said. "She is so odd and cold that she would attract no man. Now she will be different. She will encourage him. She will be gracious, and who could resist Lucia when she smiles? Already she is less moody."

The President stroked his little grey imperial.

"Dene, without doubt, admired her," he said, "but these Englishmen are slow wooers. Then, too, I am not quite sure how Dene may regard my method of ending the revolution. I was obliged to use a little strategy."

The Senora looked at him thoughtfully. She was well

aware that the ways of Republics in that hemisphere were a little strange, and her sympathies were entirely with her lord and master. But she was also aware that Dene's point of view would be a very different one.

"Strategy," she repeated thoughtfully. "Was it anything very—very——?"

The President took his cigar from his mouth and looked at its white ash thoughtfully.

"There were one or two," he said apologetically, "whom I was forced to shoot. It was for the good of the Republic."

"After they had given up their arms?"

The President nodded.

"It was really necessary," he said. "Every one insisted upon it. The unfortunate part of it is that as Dene brought the message to me, he may consider himself in some manner responsible. It sounds far-fetched," he continued, "but these Englishmen are so terribly punctilious, and Dene, of course, is not accustomed to the—er—exigencies of politics in San Martina. You understand, my love?"

The Senora understood quite well. When she chose to take an interest in affairs outside her wardrobe she was as keen-witted as the President himself.

"Have you any idea," she asked, "where Sagasta is hiding?"

Her husband shook his head gloomily.

"The city has been ransacked," he declared. "He must have taken to the open country. We are organising a search party."

"Have you thought of Beau Desir?" she asked.

He stroked his imperial and reflected.

"I had not—definitely," he admitted. "Now that you mention it, the thing seems possible."

"I have heard you say," she continued, "that it is these English always who are so faithful to one another in strange countries. So cold ever at home, so devoted in foreign lands. To whom, then, would Sagasta fly save to Gregory Dene? And ah! there is more. Listen. Sagasta would say to Dene, 'It was you who brought the terms of peace from the President, it was through you that I disbanded my men, and now it is my life they are seeking. You must hide or defend me. I appeal to you as a brother Englishman.' Behold!"

The President bestowed upon his wife a glance of admiration.

"You should have been a man and a councillor," he said, "great though would have been my loss. To-day I shall send to Beau Desir."

She held up two stumpy fingers of her bejewelled hand.

"Be careful," she said, "whom you send. Above everything in the world, Gregory Dene must not be offended. Let us suppose that he espouses the cause of Sagasta. It is possible. Then Sagasta may be taken by stealth and scheming. It is Lucia who will help us with Dene. If Sagasta is under his protection, surround him, let him not communicate with his friends, keep him hemmed in—and wait."

The President rose from his chair.

"You are wonderful, my love!" he said. "I will go and despatch a messenger to Beau Desir."

Again she had a suggestion. A wonderful woman this in her tawdry gown and blazing jewellery—a wonderful woman when she chose to think.

“Send Eugène,” she said.

The President hesitated.

“Eugène is not pleasing me just now,” he said. “I do not know whether I could consider him a thoroughly trustworthy messenger.”

“Gustave! Our own son. How detestable!”

“He is not taking care of himself,” the President hastened to explain. “I have heard of him, Julie, again as being the worse for wine.”

She nodded her head vigorously.

“Leave him to me, Gustave. I will speak to him. But it is he and he only who must go to Beau Desir. I wish him to become friendly with this Senor Dene. He will talk to him, he will hear him speak—of our dear girl. Let Eugène be sent to me.”

The President rose and lit a fresh cigar. His hour had arrived for audiences, and he was forced to tear himself from the domestic circle.

“It shall be as you wish, Julie,” he said, “but if Eugène bungles this I shall never forgive him. Gregory Dene *must* be conciliated. He is the most useful ally we could have, or the most dangerous enemy.”

Once more the Senora nodded her head vigorously, and glanced over her shoulder to where Lucia was sitting absorbed.

“Have no fear, my dear Gustave,” she said. “Think of our daughter and rest easy. Gregory Dene will be our

relative and our very good friend. It is certain. Then when the next revolution comes—well, just a telegram, and behold a British man-of-war. The President's daughter is an English lady. She must be protected. Ah, it is so simple. Hasten and send Eugène to me."

CHAPTER XXI

THE RIFLE-SHOT AT DAWN

A SINGLE rifle-shot rang out through the dim grey dawn, travelling down the hillside and along the valley of Beau Desir to the ears of one man at least in the little settlement.

Gregory Dene opened the door of his house, and standing upon the wooden floor of his piazza, looked out towards the hills. A little wreath of white smoke was floating downwards; in the clear silence of the unrisen day he could hear distinctly the sound of a galloping horse coming towards him down the winding road. Angus joined him in a moment, half-dressed and with grave face. He was a man of peace, and Dene's words had been a trouble to him. All night long he had lain awake wondering how long it might be before the first blow would fall. The sound of this rifle-shot in the early dawn had seemed like an answer to him.

Dene and he exchanged glances.

"It is probably a messenger from San Martina," Dene said. "But I do not understand the shot. Listen."

The thunder of horse's hoofs was distinctly audible now. Soon a man, hatless, and swaying a little in his seat,

mounted upon a small native horse, came galloping round the corner. He wore the yellow uniform of a staff officer in President Ramirez' army, and his face, when he checked his horse and dismounted, was pale with fear. Dene stepped forward to greet him, and at the same moment recognised him with an exclamation of surprise.

"Captain Ramirez! Why, what has happened? There is no bad news, I hope?"

Ramirez, being now on his feet and safe, began slowly to recover his self-possession.

"There is no bad news—from San Martina," he said, "but I have had a narrow escape from assassination upon your territory, Mr. Dene. I was shot at not a mile away by a man in hiding. The bullet passed through my hat. It was a villainous attempt."

"Did you see the man who fired the shot?" Dene asked, quietly. "Can you identify him?"

Captain Ramirez shook his head.

"No. He was hiding behind some bushes. The coward! He would shoot only from cover—he would not show himself. My mare bolted, or I would have risked everything and gone for him."

"Can you point out the exact spot from which the shot was fired?" Dene asked quickly.

Ramirez lifted his finger.

"You see the bend in the plantation there?" he said. "The man must have been just inside there, or behind a great boulder nearer the road."

Dene's face was dark with anger. He laid his hand upon the bridle of the young man's horse.

"Angus," he said, "show Captain Ramirez into my house, and wake Brown up. Let him get breakfast and some wine. I shall be back within an hour."

He swung himself upon the horse and cantered up the steep road. In a few minutes he reached the plantation which Ramirez had pointed out. With his revolver in his hand, he dismounted and plunged into the semi-darkness of the closely growing pine trees.

"If the man had half the pluck of his sister," he muttered to himself, "he would have searched this place. It's only a few yards deep."

It took him scarcely five minutes to assure himself that there was no one lurking there. The traces of recent occupation were evident enough—there was even a faint flavour of gunpowder in the sweet morning air delicately redolent with the odour of the pines and many sweet-smelling shrubs. But whomever the would-be assassin might have been, he had got clear away. Dene, after a careful examination of the place, was puzzled to imagine by what means he could have made his egress. From where he had dismounted there was a fine view of the open country, and higher up on the mountains there was little or no cover near. The further end of the plantation terminated in a precipice, sheer, and apparently inaccessible. Below was the valley of Beau Desir; leaning over with his arm around a young pine sapling, Dene could see the roofs of the settlement houses, below, so directly underneath that a pine-cone which he kicked with his foot fell nearly upon the corrugated roof of the little mission church. He looked all round for any means of descent. Apparently

there were none. To climb down was a thing absolutely impossible. Nevertheless, Dene was thoughtful and left the place with reluctance.

He rode down the hillside and back into the settlement. Instead, however, of entering at once his own house, he handed over the little mare to Pietro and knocked at the door of Dom Pedro's cottage. It was opened after scarcely a minute's hesitation by Pedro himself, but not before Dene had softly tried the latch and found the door locked.

"You are up early, Pedro," Dene remarked.

"Not so early but that you yourself are astir," was the prompt and cheerful answer. "It was a rifle-shot which disturbed me."

Dene nodded.

"Come out into the Plaza, Pedro," he said. "I have something to ask you."

Pedro followed without hesitation. Dene waited till the plantation was well in view. Then he pointed towards it.

"The shot," he remarked, "was fired from there. The man who fired it must have been concealed amongst those trees. Now you have the reputation of knowing every inch of country round here, Pedro. Can you tell me where, in the space of a quarter of an hour, the man who fired that shot could have hidden himself?"

Pedro looked all around, and shook his head.

"I can see no hiding place," he declared.

"There is no way down into the settlement?"

"With wings," Pedro answered, "or a parachute."

"You know of no path?"

"It would need to be an aërial one," Pedro answered

grimly. "No, there is no way down there save at a fearful risk of life."

"Do you know who our early visitor is?" Dene asked.

Pedro made no answer, but for a moment there was a strange look in his eyes.

"It is Captain Rimarez," Dene continued. "He seems to have had a narrow escape of his life. Pedro, your boots are very wet. Have you been out before this morning?"

"To my potato patch," Pedro answered. "The dew was heavy upon the leaves."

Dene was more thoughtful than ever.

"Pedro," he said seriously, "I ask no more questions. The young man is unhurt, or within five minutes I would have every rifle in the place brought here for my examination. But listen. If harm comes to him, or any of his family or friends, at the hands of any of my people, I will hang the guilty man upon the nearest tree, even though it be John Angus or you, Pedro. That is my word to you, and you know that I am one who is faithful to my threats and promises."

He nodded and walked away. Pedro, with a queer little smile upon his lips, turned on his heel and re-entered his cottage. Opening a cupboard he took down a rifle. With a touch of the ejector a spent cartridge came out from the left-hand barrel. He replaced it with a new one, and sat down to breakfast.

CHAPTER XXII

A FACE AMONGST THE SHADOWS

CAPTAIN EUGÈNE RIMAREZ, having drunk nearly a bottle of excellent claret, and done full justice in other ways to an exceptionally well-spread breakfast table, was beginning to feel himself again. His cheeks were no longer pale, and he could hold his knife and fork with hands that had ceased to tremble. Despite his uniform and commission the man was a coward, and the fact of his narrow escape had completely unnerved him.

He looked up on Dene's entrance, and greeted him with an affectation of carelessness.

"Well," he inquired, "have you made any discoveries?"

Dene shook his head.

"No such luck," he declared. "I examined the place thoroughly, however, and I discovered this—that your assailant could not have returned here except by the road, and that we know he has not done. In ten minutes I shall know whether any one is missing from Beau Desir, or not. If every one can answer to their names, you must hold my people guiltless of this, Captain Rimarez."

The young man shrugged his shoulders, and helped himself to more claret.

"If not one of your people, Senor Dene," he said, "who could it have been? I have ridden unmolested through the darkest part of the night. I am within ten minutes ride of your headquarters when this shot is fired. If not as I say, one of your people, where are we to look for the dastard?"

Dene took his seat at the table, and proceeded to the discussion of his own more modest meal.

"You have had trouble in San Martina," he said, "and you have made outlaws. Some of them may be hiding around here. The sight of your uniform would be quite sufficient for them. Then again, it may have been a matter of personal enmity. In any case, I trust you will believe that I sincerely regret the occurrence."

"We will dismiss it," Ramirez said magnanimously. "We will hear the result of your roll-call, and if it is satisfactory—well, we will say that the shot was fired by a stranger."

Dene leaned forward, and called to Angus, who was waiting outside. He came at once up on to the Piazza. As yet the day's work was not begun, so his task had been easy. He had even exceeded Dene's instructions. Every dwelling-house in Beau Desir had been ransacked; the roll-call, from beginning to end, had been satisfactorily answered. Dene's face grew lighter as Angus concluded his report.

"You hear, sir," he remarked, turning to Ramirez. "Not a single one of my people is absent."

"I will answer for that," Angus affirmed, "with my life."

Rimarez nodded.

"It is good," he declared. "We will take it for granted, then, that your people are guiltless. You see I am not unreasonable or hard to convince. Now you made two other suggestions. Let us consider them."

Dene signed to Angus to withdraw, and produced cigars. Captain Rimarez lit one, and continued—

"In the first place, you suggested a personal enemy. Well, I know of none such to whom my death would be pleasing, save—save—to a woman."

The flush faded for a moment from his sallow cheeks, and he frowned heavily. His prominent white teeth met together, there was a wicked gleam in his eyes. At that moment, the face of Captain Rimarez was an evil thing to look upon.

He recovered himself very shortly, shaking himself free with a little gesture of relief from such untoward memories.

"That possibility then," he said, "we may dismiss. Your next suggestion embraces the reason of my visit to you."

He looked sharply at Dene, who met his gaze without comprehension. He did not, indeed, understand at what the other was aiming.

"You spoke," Rimarez explained, "of the rebellion—of outlaws. It is true. There are outlaws from San Martina, and chief amongst them all is Sagasta."

"I understood," Dene put in, "that his pardon was one of the conditions of peace."

"Every condition that was made," Captain Rimarez declared, "Sagasta broke. The whole matter is not one,

Mr. Dene, which you would understand. But I can tell you this amongst other things. Sagasta presented himself at the Presidency declaring himself unarmed, was shown into my father's presence, who was really anxious to understand his grievances. Whereupon he produced a revolver, and holding him, as he thought, at his mercy, tried to force him to sign certain documents. Fortunately the guards rushed in, and Sagasta, owing to my father's ill-timed clemency, was allowed to escape. He then again endeavoured to effect a rising, and to have himself proclaimed President. The people, however, were scarcely ready for another rebellion quite so soon, and he had hard work to escape from the city. But he managed it by some means—he is a clever fellow, and no one has seen or heard of him since."

"I am very sorry to hear this," Dene said. "Sagasta is a good fellow at heart, and was once a friend of mine."

"So," Captain Ramirez said slowly, "we understood. I come here, Mr. Dene, on a mission of some difficulty. I am charged by my father to remind you that you are now a citizen, and one of the chief citizens of San Martina, and as such you are amenable to its laws and to the authority of the State."

"I admit it," Dene declared. "Go on."

"Is Sagasta in hiding here, Mr. Dene?"

"On my oath, no," Dene answered heartily. "I began to wonder what on earth you were driving at."

"You have not seen him since you left San Martina?"

"Certainly not."

"Or heard of him?"

"No."

Captain Ramirez waved his hand lightly.

"It is enough," he said. "Between men of honour it is sufficient. What I have to say, then, will be a surprise to you. Sagasta did not escape by sea. In San Martina people smile when his name is mentioned, and they point ever one way—yonder."

Dene followed the yellow-stained slender finger. It was lifted to the hills which overtopped the valley.

"In the Andiguan hills," Ramirez continued, "there are secret passes and many hiding places. Somewhere there Sagasta lies concealed. I would wager a thousand dollars that it was his hand which fired this infernal shot."

Ramirez took off his hat and contemplated it ruefully. Even now, after a full bottle of that most excellent claret, he felt uncomfortable when he reflected how near, how very near, that shot had come to ending his most disreputable life.

Dene was thoughtful for several minutes. He began to understand the purport of this young man's visit.

"You have more to say to me, I suppose," he remarked, after a short pause. "You have a definite mission here?"

Captain Ramirez arranged his mustachios to his satisfaction and assented.

"Yes. I have come to ask you to join with me in a search for Sagasta, to secure him if possible, and to provide me with an escort to take him back to San Martina."

"It is a military task," Dene answered frowning. "I and my people here are men of peace. We do not wish to

interfere in political or military matters at all. Bring your soldiers and do as you will upon my land."

"It was my father's particular desire," Ramirez answered, "that I should bring no soldiers into Beau Desir, and I may say that his feeling was one of courtesy and consideration towards you. I leave the arrangements quite in your hands. Only, I have come here to seek for Sagasta, and I require your aid."

"Which you shall have," Dene declared promptly. "You and I will go together."

"A most unnecessary risk," Ramirez protested. "We ought to have an escort of half a dozen at least."

"Sagasta is probably alone," Dene said contemptuously. "You and I could take him by force easily, if necessary."

"I really protest. I—Great God!"

Captain Ramirez had risen to his feet and strolled towards the wide-open window. He was standing there during the commencement of his last sentence. Suddenly the words seemed to die away upon his lips. His eyes were riveted upon the space in front of the schoolhouse window, and his face was like the face of a man stricken with a sudden deadly illness. Dene, startled at his appearance, hastened to his side.

"What on earth is the matter, Ramirez?" he cried. "Are you ill?"

But Ramirez could do no more than lift that unprepossessing forefinger and point towards the schoolroom window

CHAPTER XXIII

A YELLOW RIBBON

IT was several moments before Rimarez could collect himself sufficiently to speak. He had meanwhile all the appearance of a man suffering from a paroxysm of fear. His sallow cheeks were blanched and livid, and he swayed unsteadily upon his feet like a drunken man. All the time his eyes never moved from a certain spot across the Square, and they were as the eyes of a man who sees into another world. When he spoke, it was to himself. He seemed unconscious or oblivious of the fact that he was not alone.

"It was a shadow," he muttered. "A dream! But I saw her. Great God, I saw her!"

Then he turned round, and finding Dene by his side, laughed in a hollow, affected way.

"I am afraid I frightened you," he said. "I am not quite myself to-day—it is the night ride—and I had a most ridiculous fancy. By the bye, who lives in the cottage opposite—the one with the flowers?"

Then Dene began to reflect, and with an effort he lied.

"Our schoolmistress," he said.

"How long—has she been with you?"

"Since we first came."

"And her name?"

"Mercier. She is a French Canadian."

It was evidently unfamiliar to Ramirez, but although reassured, he was not altogether satisfied.

"Has she any relations amongst you?" he asked. "A brother by any chance?"

Dene shook his head.

"She is," he answered, "a stranger to us all."

Ramirez drew a little breath.

"I am tormented," he said, "by a most extraordinary hallucination. I am going to ask your permission to speak for one moment with the woman whose face I saw just now."

"There could be no objection to that," Dene said slowly. "I will send over and ask her to come across for a moment."

He took up a sheet of paper from his desk and scribbled across it in pencil.

"Ramirez is here. Fancies he has seen you. Insists upon coming across."

He twisted it up and gave it to Brown. The man crossed the Place with it and returned almost immediately.

"Miss Mercier will have finished dressing in five minutes, when she will be pleased if you will step across, sir," was the answer.

The two men heard the message with equal relief.

Dene, wholly ignorant of the relations between these people, began to wonder whether his falsehood had been unnecessary. He left Rimarez for a moment whilst he ordered their horses and saw to the loading of his revolver. When he came back, Rimarez was walking swiftly across the open space towards the opposite cottage. With a sudden apprehension of evil he turned sharply round and followed him.

Rimarez, recovering in some measure from his shock, had told himself that it was impossible for him to have been mistaken. He was sober; an illusion so complete was not possible. He would know the truth; he would run no risk of being outwitted. But when he entered the little room into which he had seen it was surely a stranger who turned to face him with mild wonderment. She was grey-haired, and on her face were many wrinkles. She wore glasses, and her figure had already attained the robustness of middle age. Dene, who was looking over his shoulder and who saw a complete stranger, was no whit less surprised than Rimarez himself.

"I beg your pardon," Rimarez faltered. "I thought that I recognised a face at the window here just now."

"It was mine, if anybody's," the lady answered. "It's too early for visitors yet awhile in these parts, anyway."

It was well for Rimarez that he could not see the look of mingled amazement and admiration on Dene's face. He himself was completely mystified.

"I was mistaken, evidently," he said. "I beg your pardon, madam."

He withdrew, and found Dene with the horses outside.

"I have been dreaming this morning, or else your claret was marvellously potent," he said shortly. "You are determined, then, to start on this search alone?"

"I am sure that we do not need aid," Dene answered. "Besides, we are harvesting, and I need every man on the place. I can ill-afford to be away myself."

"You are quite sure of your own people?" Ramirez asked nervously. "You fully appreciate the consequences to yourself and them of any treachery?"

"There is nothing of that sort to fear," Dene answered stiffly. "I hold my charter from your father, President Ramirez, and if Sagasta is a traitor I shall forget that he is my countryman and was once my friend. This way."

The two men cantered off. From behind her window a woman watched them, with a faint smile upon her lips, until they became black specks upon the hillside. Dene reined in his horse for a moment and looked downwards at his possessions.

"There is no finer field of corn than that," he said, "in the new world or the old. If only we can get it all safely housed we are sure of a prosperous year."

Captain Ramirez followed the outstretched whip with his eyes. Below them was a solid plain of deep-yellow corn stretching away in one glorious sweep to the eastern horizon. Already half a dozen machines, with men like insects at their sides, were at work, but the path of fallen corn was like a thin insignificant line across the golden sea.

"It will take you a month to get it all in," Ramirez said. Dene smiled.

"Not quite so long, I hope," he said. "Yet when

you see such a harvest waiting for the reaping, you can understand what I mean when I say that my men are men of peace. We want to be disturbed by no political troubles. We want to be left to ourselves to work out our own destiny."

Captain Rimarez shrugged his shoulders.

"For them, your men, it is well," he said. "But you, surely you should have ambitions! You are not content to spend the rest of your life as an agriculturist?"

"It is the greatest desire I have that I may be allowed to do so," Dene answered. "I have many ambitions, but they have no kinship with politics or the life of cities."

"It is a pity," Rimarez answered. "My father has been much impressed by you. He would give you a place in his government to-morrow if you would accept it."

Dene laughed.

"He would soon repent it," he declared. "I have no head for making laws. By the way, I trust that the ladies of your family are well?"

Rimarez bowed, and produced an envelope from his pocket.

"Your question reminds me," he said, "that I am the bearer of a message from them. They are giving a fancy dress ball. This, I think, is your invitation."

Dene opened his lips to utter some formal regret that his dancing days were over. Then as he received the envelope into his hands he was conscious of receiving something very much like a thrill. It was tied up with a yellow ribbon, and from the envelope there floated out on to the clear morning air a breath of very sweet perfume—and Dene

was back again in the conservatory at the Presidency looking into Lucia's dark sweet eyes, watching the scarlet blossoms flash about her blue-black hair. It was a little vista, the dream of a moment. But Dene took the invitation and murmured his thanks.

CHAPTER XXIV

A TRAGEDY ON THE MOUNTAIN

AS the sun rose higher in the heavens, the heat upon the bare hillside became almost unbearable. Rimarez, although he had taken off his coat and was riding only in his shirt and trousers, announced every moment his intention of going no further. He was in evil condition for any physical strain. The perspiration rolled from his forehead like water, and there were dark marks under his eyes. At midday he turned upon Dene with an oath.

"You want to kill me," he said savagely. "Did you not say that up here there was always a breeze? I never felt heat like it. My throat is as dry as a lime-kiln. Sagasta or no Sagasta, let us find some shade where we can rest."

Even Dene, in his white linen clothes and with his frame hardened by all manner of out-door sports and labour, was beginning to feel the effect of the merciless sun.

"It is hotter than I have ever known it here," he admitted. "There is generally a breeze from the sea at this height."

"Have you any idea at all where we are?" Rimarez

asked impatiently. "How far off is the pass of Montinastre?"

Dene pointed with his riding-whip to where a belt of pine trees ran down the mountain's side.

"I believe," he said, "that it is there. At any rate we shall find shade and a stream."

"Then for heaven's sake on!" cried Rimarez, urging his horse with the spurs. "Another hour of this would kill me."

Dene followed a yard or two behind. Rimarez rose several times in his saddle and examined the surrounding country.

"As I live, I believe that is the pass," he muttered. "See how those trees rise one above the other. There is a cleft somewhere."

Dene nodded.

"This is the pass right enough," he said. "Whether we shall find any traces of Sagasta or not is a different matter, though."

Together they rode over the rough ground until they reached the opening of the pinewood. They then dismounted and tethered their horses. Rimarez, with a groan, threw himself upon the ground and lit a cigarette. Dene filled his pipe, and leaned against a tree trunk a few yards away.

"I cannot make out any path," he remarked, looking upwards, "but one can see from the shelving tops that there is a cleft, and probably a deep one. We had better try and get up to the top as soon as you are rested."

"I shall not move," Rimarez declared sullenly, "for an hour."

"Then I will go on alone," Dene said coolly. "I really cannot afford to give much time to what I feel sure will turn out to be a wild-goose chase. If I discover anything I will fire my revolver."

Rimarez looked around and shivered a little. He hated solitude, and the deep silence of these altitudes oppressed him. He rose sullenly to his feet.

"We will remain together," he said. "We should only lose more time if we missed one another. What we want to do is to look for some signs of—the blessed Saints, there it is—the path!"

Dene strode over to his side. There was no doubt about it. A path had been hewn through the pine trees and brushwood only a few yards below where they were. They swung easily down to it through the bushes. Not only was there a path, but there were traces of a man's recent progress along it. It led, from where they stood, upwards through the mountain and downwards to the valley of Beau Desir.

"Come along," Dene cried, bending low and plunging into the cool soft darkness of the wood. "We must see where this leads to."

But Rimarez hesitated. There was something a little uncanny about this deep twilight silence into which they had suddenly passed after the glare of the morning. He found himself listening for sounds, and peering anxiously about at suspicious-looking shrubs.

"There is no need for us to explore further to-day," he said. "Let us go back to Beau Desir and get some men. If Sagasta is in hiding here he probably has friends. You and I alone could never take him."

Dene laughed scornfully.

"We are armed," he said, "and they will be unprepared. Besides, I have an account of my own to settle with Sagasta."

Rimarez halted irresolute. He was very much averse to being left alone; he was a little more averse to following up that footpath to its probable termination. Suddenly he held up his finger.

"Listen!" he cried nervously. "Hush!"

Dene stopped short, and the two men held their breath. There was nothing to be heard. The deep silence seemed absolutely unbroken save by the faintest of breezes which shook the dark tree-tops and the far-off trickling of a water-course.

"There is nothing to be afraid of," Dene said quietly. "This path seems to me to run right down to Beau Desir, and I am going to find out about it."

"I thought that I heard voices," Rimarez faltered. "Remember, Sagasta is my personal enemy. If he should have friends with him——"

Dene turned impatiently away, and Rimarez, after a moment's hesitation, followed him. The path had evidently been made with great difficulty, for the ascent was steep and the pines grew closer and closer together. Nevertheless, they made good progress, and in less than half an hour they could see light in front. Dene pointed to it.

"We are near the top," he said. "Follow me carefully."

As they reached the last few yards of their climb the path became almost perpendicular. They had to pull

themselves up by means of tree stumps, apparently left jutting out of the soil for that purpose. Dene was leading, and he first swung himself up, and turning round half lifted Rimarez to his side. Breathless, they stood upright and looked eagerly around. Then a strange thing happened. From every side there flashed out a long shining rifle-barrel. A tall figure loomed up against the empty background of sky, and a quick, imperative voice rang out with a brief command—

“Throw down your revolvers!”

Quick as lightning Dene’s hand was in his hip pocket, but before he could withdraw it a rifle-bullet whistled past his ear at so short a range that his face was blackened with the powder. He cast a swift glance around. It was not one man, but seven or eight who surrounded them. He accepted the inevitable and threw his revolver on to the ground, where his companion’s weapon already lay.

It was Sagasta who had confronted them. He was looking straight past Dene into Rimarez’s face, and the light in his countenance was not a pleasant thing to look upon.

“You are very welcome, gentlemen, he said, with an evil sweetness in his tone. “You, Mr. Dene, I am always glad to entertain, for I fear that I am in some measure a trespasser upon your land—and you, Captain Rimarez, well, you know how accounts stand between us. You are the most welcome visitor whom chance has ever sent me.”

Rimarez’ face was livid with fear, and Dene himself was uneasy.

“I want a word with you, Sagasta,” he said.

Sagasta waved his hand.

"These gentlemen," he said, "are my friends, and have my whole confidence; you can speak without reserve."

Dene glanced around. There were several faces there which he had seen in San Martina.

"I went to President Rimarez," Dene said, "at your request, and made with him on your behalf certain definite arrangements. Now, I am given to understand that you treacherously departed from these, and under false pretences entered the President's house and attempted his assassination. I——"

"You have been given to understand," Sagasta interrupted, with flashing eyes, "a pack of infernal falsehoods. The boot is on the other leg. The falsehood and treachery lie at the door of that man," pointing to Rimarez, "and his cursed father. I went unarmed into their house: that I left it alive is even now a matter of wonder to me. Ask him yourself for the truth. The coward! He has no words."

Dene turned to his companion.

It was true. He was speechless with fear. There was a sinister smile upon Sagasta's face. He evidently meant mischief.

"If I have been misled," Dene said slowly, "I must apologise to you, Sagasta, for my hasty judgment."

"I have no quarrel with you," Sagasta answered significantly. "You are welcome to leave when you choose. As to your companion—he can guess, I think, what is in store for him. Manuel, bring a rope and knot it to the tallest of those trees."



"Rimarez sunk to the ground. His face was blanched with fear."

Rimarez sunk to the ground. His face was blanched with fear. Dene stepped hastily forward.

"Sagasta," he exclaimed, "What are you going to do?"

"We are going to hang him," was the fierce reply.

Rimarez started moaning to his feet.

"Why, it is barbarous!" he cried, "For the love of heaven, say that you are not in earnest. I will see my father. Your sentence shall be revoked. Senor Dene, you will not let them murder me!"

"I sincerely hope, Sagasta," Dene said, "that you will not attempt anything so horrible."

Sagasta smiled grimly, and unslung a pair of field-glasses from his shoulders.

"You call it horrible. Step this way, Mr. Dene," he said.

The two men walked together for several yards towards the further side of the mountain. Suddenly Dene uttered a little exclamation of surprise. As they emerged from the trees a marvellous panorama unfolded itself. Below was a narrow belt of wooded country, and beyond the sea. Looking northwards, San Martina seemed to lie almost at their feet, its white houses with their luxurious gardens, its terraced heights and the shipping in the large harbour all clearly visible through the hot, still air. Sagasta thrust the glasses into Dene's hands.

"Look steadily towards the Plaza," he said.

Dene looked, and his face became grave.

"You see gallows there?" Sagasta asked.

"Yes."

"And men hanging from them?"

Again Dene assented with a little shudder.

"Those," Sagasta said, "are the bodies of my friends butchered to death by Rimarez—men who like myself trusted to the peaceful message which you brought back to us from the President. Do you realise what this means? They were young men, three of them, whose only crime was a hatred of corrupt government, and a desire to see the affairs of the State administered according to the laws of the country and ordinary civilisation. Young men, Dene like you and I were years ago, who had ideals and dared to proclaim them, even as they have dared to use stronger weapons than speech. You have shown that the love of freedom and the love of your fellow-men is still with you, for you have given some portion of your life and career for that handful of downtrodden men and women whom you brought out from England to this new country. You can not help but sympathise with me—and them!"

He pointed a grim forefinger downwards to where San Martina lay smiling in the tropical sunshine all unconscious of the black spot which she carried in her bosom. Then he looked into Dene's face, and he saw that his words had told.

"I do sympathise with you, and with them," Dene said earnestly. "Further, I will go myself to the President and demand an explanation of these things. If I was made the bearer of a bogus message of peace I will insist upon redress. But I do most heartily beg of you to refrain from this most hideous reprisal. Remember, that for cruelty and disregard of social laws it puts you on the same footing as them. You will have lost your grievance. You will probably alienate popular sympathy."

Sagasta smiled.

"You do not know the man for whom you are pleading," he said. "There is not a man or woman in San Martina who would lament his death. He is a blackguard many degrees worse than the President, his father."

"He is at any rate the brother of the woman who set you free."

Sagasta shrugged his shoulders.

"So you know of that. Well, I am sorry for Lucia, but I should be very weak if I allowed any sentimental objections to stand in the way of justice."

"Justice," Dene exclaimed. "Who made you his judge, Sagasta? If his life has been what you say, there is a harvest of sorrows before him. Let him live to reap it."

Sagasta shook his head.

"The justice of Heaven," he said, "may be sure, but it is too slow for me. No. Ramirez dies. As for you, Dene, you are welcome to go or stay."

Sagasta turned on his heel and walked back towards the little group of men. Dene, with his hand upon his arm, made a last appeal.

"Sagasta," he said, "the man is my guest. He is travelling here under my protection. I warn you that if you proceed to extremes you make an enemy of me. Come, be reasonable. Keep him a prisoner until the morning, at any rate."

Sagasta was apparently deaf. He shook himself free from Dene's grasp.

"He will never see another morning," he said grimly. "Rebault, are you ready?"

There was a chorus of assent.

"Pinion him," Sagasta ordered.

There was a little rush towards the prisoner, who had sunk upon his knees. Their hatred of him was emphasised by the haste with which each one strove to bear a hand in the task. At that moment an inspiration came to Dene. He stooped suddenly down and picked up the two revolvers which lay almost at his feet. Then he set his back against a tree.

"The first man who stirs," he said quietly, "I will shoot."

CHAPTER XXV

THE DICTATOR

IT was an odd turn of the tables, but a complete one. For the moment Dene certainly held the whole party at his mercy. Sagasta's companions had one and all thrown down their weapons when they had rushed forward to hold and bind Ramirez. Sagasta himself was, or appeared to be, unarmed. Dene, with a revolver in each hand, stood at a convenient distance from the little group, too far away to be rushed, too near for any chance of missing his mark should he fire. In the momentary confusion Ramirez wrestled himself free from his captors and made his way to Dene's side. He stood there, a trembling, shrunken figure—even Dene looked at him in contempt.

Sagasta's face was as black as night, but neither he nor any of the others stirred from their places. The long-delayed breeze from the ocean below crept up and shook the leaves of the trees around them. From the cornfield came floating up the whirr of the distant reaping-machines. The rope, with its noose already fashioned, swayed gently to and fro.

Dene faced Sagasta and spoke. The hands which grasped those two revolvers were rigid and firm.

"Captain Ramirez," he said, "is an envoy to me from his father, the President of San Martina, and is under my protection. I am not concerned in the internal dissensions of this State, and as regards your quarrels, I am neutral. But to-day I am responsible for the safety of my guest, and I will shoot the first man who lays a hand upon him. Apart from this, you are trespassers at this moment upon my land, and I will not for one moment sanction such a barbarism as you have dared to propose."

Sagasta smiled bitterly.

"I do not admit your landlordship," he said, "but we are certainly under the power of your revolver."

A word from Dene, and Ramirez slunk off. There was a little movement as though to intercept him, but Sagasta raised his hand.

"Let him go," he directed. "I have lost too many friends already. His life is not worth the risk of one of yours."

Down the hillside they could hear him crashing blindly through the bushes and undergrowth, madly anxious to reach the spot where they had tethered their horses before Dene's mastery over the little party should cease. Many angry eyes were flashing upon Dene. Even then at a single gesture from their leader they were willing to throw themselves upon him. But Sagasta gave no signal. He knew his man too well.

"For the moment, Dene," he said quietly, "you have triumphed. Have you counted the cost? When my

whereabouts is known, my followers will flock out here to me. What is to prevent my raiding your settlement and burning your crops?"

"Come when you choose," Dene answered. "We shall be ready for you. There is not a man in Beau Desir who will not fight to the death for his home and his women-kind."

Sagasta stood for a moment irresolute. Then he came over to Dene's side and laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"Dene," he said earnestly, "we should be friends. We are fellow-countrymen, and I think that our aims are very much the same. Put down your revolver. We have no horses, so we cannot pursue Rimarez, and we have no quarrel with you."

Dene thrust his revolver into his pocket, and lit a cigar. Along the mountain path they could hear the muffled thud of a galloping horse. Rimarez was safe.

"I have no desire," Dene said, "to quarrel with any one."

"Come over to our side," Sagasta continued. "Let me explain to you at least the cause which I represent, and the grievances which have made the free men of the State hate the name of Rimarez."

Dene shook his head slowly but firmly.

"You forget," he said, "that I have not myself alone to consider. I am responsible for the welfare and safety of all those who have thrown their lot in with me. It is from President Rimarez that I hold my charter, and it is to him I must look as the head of this State. My individual sympathies are nothing. If they counted I might be with you. As it is, I am neutral."

Sagasta shook his head.

"Neutrality," he said, "is an impossible position for you. Even now you were helping the son of President Ramirez to discover our hiding place."

"Then you must write me down," Dene said, "as an enemy."

"That is a bold speech for a prisoner," Sagasta exclaimed, with a note of menace in his tone.

"I am not your prisoner," Dene answered calmly. "In the first place, you have guaranteed my safety, apart from which as a matter of fact your life is entirely at my mercy. If any of your men lay a hand upon me they will be leaderless, for I should shoot you."

Sagasta regarded him with a smile.

"If I had a dozen like you, Dene," he said, "I would make this little State the freest in the world. Now go as quickly as you can."

Dene held out his hand.

"Take my advice, and leave this country, Sagasta," he said. "You will fritter your life away here to no purpose. There is better work to be done elsewhere."

But Sagasta shook his head slowly.

"Better work for better men, perhaps," he said. "For me there is no looking back."

* * * * *

Rimarez had ridden fast, and Dene cantered up to his side only as they entered Beau Desir. He was smoking, but his hands were trembling, and his face was still ashen white.

"That was a tolerably close shave," Dene remarked.
"For a few minutes we were in a very awkward fix."

Rimarez looked over his shoulder and scowled.

"That fellow Sagasta shall pay for this," he muttered savagely. "I'll see him hung yet."

"According to him," Dene remarked, "it was your father who started the hanging."

"And a d—d good thing too," Rimarez exclaimed, with evil emphasis. "I'd hang Sagasta and every man of them if I could. Cursed rebels."

"There is a question which I should like to ask you, Captain Rimarez," Dene said coldly. "You will remember that I was the bearer of a message from Sagasta and his friends to your father?"

Rimarez nodded.

"Very surprised we were," he said, "to think that you should mix yourself up in such a business."

"It was an errand of mercy," Dene said, "and I was very willing to undertake it. Your father's reply was pacific. Sagasta and his friends were invited to the Presidency. I want to know whether it is true that upon their arrival unarmed some of them were arrested and hanged?"

"It is wholly false," Rimarez answered. "They came and made some absurd propositions which were promptly declined. They were allowed to leave the Presidency unharmed. It was not until the next morning that the men in question were arrested."

"I am relieved to hear it," Dene said shortly. "Sagasta gave me to understand that the arrests were effected in spite of the safe conduct promised through me."

"Sagasta is a notorious and scandalous liar," Ramirez declared. "From this moment I shall not rest until he is hung."

Dene touched his horse with the spurs, and maintained for the rest of the way a contemptuous silence. Once as they turned the last corner Ramirez moved in his saddle and gazed up at the mountain's summit down which they had come. In the haze of the afternoon heat a dim blue mist seemed to hang about the dark ravine; higher up the deep green of the pines melted softly into sunlit space. It was a very beautiful view, but Ramirez was blind to it. There was venom in his white face, and an evil light in his eyes.

"You shall hang for this, Sagasta, my friend," he muttered. "I will see to it. You will cry for mercy, and I shall laugh. It will be my turn then. You shall hang for it if it costs us a regiment."

CHAPTER XXVI

A MAN AND HIS WIFE

"SAGASTA—silly fellow—great coward. He's—hic—afraid of me. I was always—hic—too clever for him. Like you, Dene. You very good chap. Governor, mater, Lucia, all like you. Saved my life. Like you, Dene. Like your claret. Tell that—hic—Johnny, bring up another bottle."

Dene rose from his seat with a little gesture of disgust, and passed out into the soft, velvety darkness. The faintly stirring breeze cooled his forehead, and he gave a little sigh of relief. Inside, Rimarez, with broken voice, was essaying the last verse of a ribald song.

It was late, and the people of Beau Desir, wearied with the long day's harvesting, were sleeping as one man. Not a light burned in any of the windows. Dene stood in the centre of the little open space in front of his house bare-headed, and drinking in the cool sweetness of the night. Suddenly something white gleamed through the darkness, and a voice, raised scarcely above a whisper yet very distinct in that stillness, called to him.

"Mr. Dene."

He was by her side in a moment. She was leaning against the wooden pillar in front of her little house, and he noticed that she had chosen a position from which she could see into his sitting-room. She pointed towards Rimarez, who was lying upon three chairs, a tumbler of claret in his hand, singing still old snatches of his evil song.

"You have a guest," she remarked.

His face darkened.

"An uninvited one," he answered, "but one whom I am forced to receive. I am afraid that his presence here is not welcome to you."

She did not answer him at once. Her eyes were fixed upon the window. The sight of that half-drunken man seemed to have fascinated her.

"What is his errand? What does he want here?"

"There is a report in San Martina," Dene answered, "that a man named Sagasta, who is an outlaw from the city, is hiding in the mountains. Captain Rimarez was sent to discover his whereabouts, if possible."

"You have been out together nearly all day," she said. "Have you been up in the mountains?"

"Yes."

"Looking for Sagasta?"

Again Dene assented.

"Did you find him?"

Dene nodded.

"We found Sagasta," he said, "but unfortunately for us he was not alone. We were taken by surprise, and Captain Rimarez had a very narrow escape of hanging."

"Tell me about it," she begged, breathlessly.

He paused for a moment, wondering at her deep interest. Then in a few words he told her what had happened. She half closed her eyes, and her face seemed very white in the dim moonlight. Was it anxiety on Eugène Rimarez's account? he wondered.

"Do you know why this man Sagasta was so incensed against Captain Rimarez?"

"The reason he gave," Dene answered, "was because the President had hung some men who went to him under cover of a flag of truce. He also seemed to have a fairly bad opinion of him all round."

"He made no other—specific charges?"

Dene shook his head.

"No."

"And he would really have hung him but for your interference?"

"Without a doubt."

"You have made an enemy of Sagasta, then?"

Dene shrugged his shoulders.

"I cannot tell. Perhaps when he reflects he will be grateful to me."

She motioned him to look across through the darkness into his lamp-lit room. Rimarez was leaning back in his chair apparently in a state of drunken collapse. His right hand still grasped a tumbler from which the last few drops of liquor were falling to the ground. His dress was disarranged, and his face ghastly. He was altogether a repulsive object to look upon.

"After all," she said bitterly, "don't you think that you may have done society an evil turn?"

Dene looked at her gravely.

"I did my duty," he said. "The man was my guest, and whatever he is, neither Sagasta or myself may be his judge."

She was silent for a while. When she spoke again it was in a different tone. It was as though she had dismissed an unpleasant matter from her mind.

"You were right about San Martina," she said. "It is worse than I had any idea of."

"It seems very wonderful to me," he remarked gravely, "that you should ever have come here."

"I had no alternative," she answered.

"At least," he persisted, "you cannot be thinking of making your home here."

She raised her eyes to his and looked at him earnestly.

"Are you so anxious," she said softly, "to get rid of me?"

He did not answer her at once. It was the first time she had ever imparted to their conversations any note of personal tenderness. He looked at her thoughtfully. She was very beautiful, and she was of the type which he had always most admired. She was leaning a little towards him, her attitude was perfectly graceful. The softer light in her eyes, the faint smile ready to break from her lips amounted almost to an invitation. He felt that if he had taken her into his arms she would scarcely have resisted. Her words only the last time he had spoken with her came back to him like a flash. "They had love," she had whispered. "Is not that a great thing?"

They stood side by side in a silence which seemed perfectly natural and free from all awkwardness. Dene

was conscious of a sense of unwonted excitement stealing through his veins and a peculiar exhilaration stirring his heart. After all, was she not right? It was Pietro who had found the royal road to happiness; he too might follow. He stooped and picked up a flower which had fallen from her bosom. Just then he did not care to look at her. He felt her eyes following his movements; he felt that in a sense she was waiting for him to speak. Still he remained silent, and the moment passed away.

"This is such a beautiful country," she said, with a little sigh. "What a pity that there should be such wretched government, so much bloodshed."

"Its politics," he remarked, with a sense of relief which he found it hard to account for, "remind one of a Gilbert and Sullivan opera. What Sagasta and his followers want no one seems to definitely know."

"I have heard it said," she murmured, "that the whole family of Rimarez are detested everywhere."

"Yet they elected him President," Dene said.

"It was his influence with the army," she declared. "Sagasta, they tell me, was once his secretary, and it was the knowledge which he gained there of the utter corruptness of Rimarez' government which induced him to join the patriots. Somehow, do you know, I should have thought that your sympathies would have been with him. He is the friend of the people—he is anxious, they say, for better laws and freedom. Rimarez has ruled as an autocrat and an evil one."

Dene looked into her face with some surprise. Her tone was low, but very earnest—almost passionate.

"You seem," he remarked, "to have found out a good deal about the place in a very short time."

"I think," she said, "that one cannot be in San Martina a day, scarcely an hour, without realising how evil the state of things is."

"It is bad," Dene admitted, "but then consider what an extraordinarily cosmopolitan population Ramirez has to deal with. It would be impossible to satisfy all of them."

"As a matter of fact," she said, "he satisfies none except his soldiers, who are over-fed and over-paid, and who are allowed to get drunk in the street and indulge in any form of license they choose. They are paid by huge taxes levied upon the people, and they exist only to terrorise them."

"It appears to me," Dene said, with some surprise, "that you know more of these matters than I do. In a certain sense I feel that it is useless my being concerned in them. I could not interfere, for my people's sake. I hold my charter from President Ramirez, and when it was granted to me I signed a promise to assist in no way in any insurrection against him."

The woman sighed. She had turned her face towards the mountains from which came stealing downwards a cool night breeze delicately fragrant with the odour of the pines. Up there, somewhere above the gorge, a night bird was singing—the far-away sweetness of its song was the only living sound which broke the deep, solemn stillness. Dene was conscious that he was fast drifting into an emotional frame of mind. The woman by his side had twined her long, graceful arms around her head, and he saw for the

first time that her upturned face, very fair and delicate in the ghostly light, was stained with tears.

"Some day," he said, with a sudden impulse, "I want you to tell me the story of your life, and what brought you out here. Will you?"

She looked at him wistfully, paler a little even than before, and without the vestige of a smile upon her quivering lips.

"Sometimes," she said, "one's history belongs more to others than to oneself. It is so with mine. I trust you now, but I could never tell you my sorrows—or my secret."

"You are young," he said, "to have either."

A sudden weariness stole into her face, a grey shadow dimming even the brightness of her eyes.

"Was I ever young? I am twenty-six years old. Confess that I look forty."

"I decline to perjure myself," he answered, smiling. "As a matter of fact you know perfectly well that you look nothing of the sort. A week or two here and you will be yourself again. Only you must not let those children tease you. They have run almost wild, and I am afraid you will find them a harum-scarum lot."

"I shall do my best with them," she answered. "I mean, like the rest of your great family here, to earn my living."

"Yours, I am afraid, will be one of the hardest tasks," he protested, "and I don't believe that you are used to anything of the sort. Let them have short hours and plenty of holiday. It will be well for them and for you."

She shook her head.

"I think that hard work is what I want," she said. "I am like so many other people in the world. I want to forget."

"Dene. Where the devil are you? Dene."

They both started round. The moon had just risen from behind a black patch of fir trees, and a long shaft of yellow light lay across the open space along and around which had been built the houses of Beau Desir. Into the centre of it came Eugène Rimarez, his face inflamed with drink, staggering from side to side, his eyes bloodshot, his voice thick with drunken anger.

"Dene, come in and—hic—help me thrash that—hic—impertinent jackan—an—apes of a servant of yours. What—you think. He won't give me—hic—the brandy. The rascal refused me—refused to give it me. Said I'd had enough. Told me so to my face. Where are you, Dene? Ha! you sly old dog. Got a woman there, eh!"

Dene and Ternissa had stood without moving at first, Dene hoping that his companion's presence would be unnoticed. But at Rimarez' last words she left the shadow of the piazza shrinking back towards the door, and Dene, as she slipped away, heard a low moan break from her lips. He turned to raise the latch for her, but in the act of doing so he was startled by a sound so unexpected that for a moment he lost his presence of mind. The whole air seemed full of Rimarez' drunken laughter.

"Ha! ha! ha!"

Rimarez had staggered up close to them and was actually leaning over the palisading which enclosed the little garden. His sallow, flushed face was distorted by a satyr-like merri

ment—he showed his protruding teeth and his bloodshot eyes were gleaming fiercely.

“Ternissa, by all the saints,” he cried, pointing a shaking finger at her. Pass her over, Dene—hic—pass her over. She’s mine—hic—belongs to me.”

He lifted one leg over the palisading. Dene seized him by the coat-collar and thrust him easily backwards. Ternissa stood upon the threshold of her cottage, pale as death in the faint moonlight.

“Let me alone,” Rimarez cried, struggling. “Hands off, I tell you. How dare you—hic—interfere between a man and his—hic—wife?”

Dene shook him like a rat.

“You drunken liar,” he said. “Get back where you came from.”

“You do not believe it,” Rimarez cried. “I tell you, man, that she is mine—belongs to me. She came out from England to—hic—join me. She’s my wife—is it not true, Ternissa? Come and give me a kiss, dear. Let us be friends again. Curse you—hic—you interfering idiot. How dare you keep a man and his wife apart? Eh! eh!”

Ternissa turned slowly round towards Dene. He knew then that some part of this story at least was true, for her face was white to the lips, and her eyes were full of dumb horror.

“Keep him away, keep him away,” she moaned. “Don’t let him come near me. For pity’s sake keep him away.”

“You are perfectly safe,” Dene assured her. “You need not have the slightest fear.”

She passed inside the house with bent head. Dene kept a firm grasp upon Rimarez' collar.

"Come back, and we will see about that brandy," he said. "I want a drink myself."

Rimarez turned a scowling face to the door through which Ternissa had passed.

"All right, my girl, all right," he cried. "I have found you now, and I will—hic—have you. I will have you if I bring my regiment here and burn the whole place. You are mine—mine. Curse all your airs and pride. You are my wife and I will have you."

Dene lifted him bodily off his feet and dragged him shrieking across the open space. He opened the door of his own room and threw him in.

"I will have—hic—satisfaction for this," Rimarez cried, livid with rage. "You shall fight me. By all the saints, you shall fight me."

Dene vouchsafed no answer. He turned the key in the lock and threw himself upon the couch in his sitting-room.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE THWARTING OF RIMAREZ

IN the soft white twilight before the dawn, Dene was out amongst the harvesters watching the great machines which had been at work since the first shaft of faint light had pierced the eastern sky. Almost half of the yellow plain had gone; the corn in great sheaves lay bound upon the close-shorn earth. Such a harvest as this had never been known in Beau Desir. Already the carpenters were busy building another great barn. Dene, who had meant to devote some part of the day towards the drilling of the younger men, had not the heart to take them from their tasks. Every one was so light-hearted, that by degrees Dene, as he rode backwards and forwards on his little mustang, forgot in a certain measure his own anxieties. Pietro was singing like a bird, and every now and then a deep chorus to his song came sweeping up the valley from the throats of a hundred stooping men. Even Angus, whose gloom was proverbial, and whose eyes seemed ever fixed upon the darker side of life, went about with an unaccustomed smile upon his lips, and gave his orders with positive cheerfulness. The hard lines upon his face had

relaxed, his stoop had gone, and he carried himself almost like a young man. Dene pulled up by his side with a cheerful greeting.

"It's a grand morning, Angus. If we get it all in we shall have enough to feed San Martina."

"And get it all in we shall, sir," was the cheerful answer. "It's the grandest spell o' weather we've had for sure. I'm thinking a month o' sunshine like this would warm old Scotland up, sir."

Dene laughed.

"It'll warm some of our young men up before the day is over, Angus. Look after them, and see they have a rest at midday. I don't want any sunstrokes."

Angus chuckled to himself, and passed on his way. He had the reputation of being a hard taskmaster, and he enjoyed it. Dene rode on, but pulled up suddenly as he came upon a man binding into sheaves the fallen corn.

"What. Dom Pedro!" he exclaimed. "How long have you turned harvestman?"

Dom Pedro straightened himself, and laughed.

"Every man's labour is wanted here to-day," he said. "Why should I be an idler? After all, I am not sure that there is any work in the world so satisfactory as the exercise of manual force. I am hungrier already than I have been for months, and as for thirst—well, there are no words in my vocabulary to fit my condition."

"Come down and have some breakfast with me," Dene said. "I must get back directly."

Dom Pedro shook his head.

"I am very hungry, it is true," he said, "and the sound

of breakfast is pleasant enough. But I go no nearer to Beau Desir than I can help, until your guest has left."

"Do you mean Rimarez?" Dene asked.

"Yes."

"You do know him, then?"

Dom Pedro drew himself up, and his eyes flashed fire.

"For an unutterable blackguard—yes. For a poisonous, slanderous cur—yes. Know him. I know him so well, that if we met I should spit in his face."

Dene looked at his companion in amazement.

"Is it as bad as that, Dom Pedro?" he said, gently.

"It is worse," was the grim reply. "There are no words to apply to such cattle. The Saints send that he keeps out of my path while he remains in Beau Desir."

Dene rode off thoughtfully. Here was a man, then, who hated Rimarez so that the very mention of his name moved him to passion. Was it not probable that he had fired that shot? Only a moment before he had uttered what amounted to a threat. If they had met face to face, who could tell what might not have happened? He looked behind as he cantered down the broad green path. Dom Pedro had not yet resumed his labours. He was standing very still and very rigid—was it a coincidence that his white face, with its bright, deep-set eyes, was turned towards that bend in the road from which Rimarez had galloped down, pale and trembling, with a bullet through his hat? Was it a coincidence, Dene wondered; or could Dom Pedro, if he chose, tell the story of that little accident?

Rimarez was sitting on the piazza as Dene rode up, shaven and carefully dressed, showing little signs of his

carouse save for a slight redness of the eyes and a pallor a little more intense than usual. He greeted Dene with a nod, and they went in to breakfast together.

"You are up earlier than I expected to see you," Dene remarked drily.

Rimarez asked for strong tea, and sipped it slowly.

"I am afraid, Mr. Dene," he said deliberately, "that my behaviour last night was scarcely what it should have been. I——"

"Please don't refer to it," Dene interrupted hastily. But Rimarez waved his words aside.

"I was drunk," he said calmly. "I sometimes am. It was an unfortunate combination of this cursed climate and that magnificent claret of yours. Further, I was excited and upset to see a certain lady in your company."

"The lady," Dene said, "was scarcely in my company. She is our schoolmistress, and a new arrival here. I know nothing more than this—nor do I desire to know more. Will you allow me to suggest that we abandon the subject."

"I regret," Rimarez answered, "that that is not possible. I have something very definite to say to you concerning it. I wish you to understand that the lady in question is my property. I take it that you have no desire for any particulars as regards——"

"Certainly not," Dene interrupted hotly.

"Precisely. It will be sufficient, I trust, for me to assure you as a gentleman that I have a prior claim upon the lady. Your acquaintance with her I was aware of. I saw you together—you may remember it—in the hotel at San Martina. Now, I have not the desire to ask you needless

questions as to her presence here, which last night you evidently tried to conceal from me. I simply make this request to you. The lady must be handed over to me without delay."

"The matter," Dene remarked coolly, "remains entirely with the lady herself. She will remain where she is, or accompany you, at her own pleasure."

Rimarez' face grew darker, and he leaned over the table towards Dene with scowling face.

"To the devil with any reservations," he said savagely. "I wish you no harm, Senor Dene, and I have no quarrel with you. But this is a matter on which I am going to have my own way. I tell you that she belongs to me. She will not deny it. I can prove it if you like."

"Your relationship with her is not my concern," Dene answered. "All I have to say is this. So long as she chooses to remain here she certainly shall. I will not have her interfered with or troubled. She shall do exactly as she pleases."

Rimarez rolled and lit a cigarette.

"There are other ways," he said quietly. "If you force me to make use of them—well, you have yourself alone to blame. I have no desire to be your enemy. You helped me out of a very awkward position yesterday. Although I can scarcely believe it possible that those rascals would have dared to go to such lengths, it is just possible, of course, that you saved my life."

Dene smiled to himself, but said nothing. The contrast between the Rimarez who lounged in the wicker chair very much at his ease, slightly patronising, with the obvious air

of being master of the situation, and the Ramirez who had grovelled on his knees a few hours ago before Sagasta, white-faced, terror-stricken, and trembling in every limb, was almost ludicrous.

"I do not like to make enemies," Dene said, "but no threats would have the slightest effect upon me. The lady remains, or not, as she chooses."

"Let me remind you," Ramirez said slowly, "of my position here. I am an envoy. I am sent to report upon the friendliness of you and your people, and the possibility of your being induced to harbour outlaws—such as Sagasta. Sagasta, as you know, we found on your domain, possibly without your knowledge, but still he was there. He appeared to have no stores or provisions—he left San Martina too hurriedly to arrange for any. How is he living? Presumably some one in Beau Desir is helping him. You see the evidence is that way. Why did he retreat on to your land unless he was depending on your help?"

"I am in no way responsible for his movements," Dene answered. "I——"

"You say so," Ramirez continued quickly, "but who is to prove it? The attitude of the Government towards you will depend solely upon my report. At present my father is well disposed towards you. He is even anxious to count you amongst his friends. I was unfortunate enough to be absent most of the evening of your visit to the Presidency, but I returned to find you established as—a friend of the family"

He looked up at Dene with meaning in his dark eyes,

and Dene thought of that fragment of yellow ribbon still in his pocket, and knew quite well what he meant.

"Your father was very hospitable," Dene said drily. "May I ask why you are—to put it plainly—indulging in this digression? I am a busy man to-day, and I want to get to my work. Will you come to the point?"

Rimarez shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes. I want that girl."

"If she is willing—then take her."

"She will not be willing."

"Then you certainly will have to leave her here."

"That is to say that you decline to give her up to me?"

"Certainly."

Rimarez rose to his feet.

"Very well. You want plain speech. You shall have it. I shall return to San Martina, and report that I found Sagasta in hiding on your land, that you evidently are a sympathiser with him, and that your people are with you. Further, that your household here is not of such a character that you should be any more welcomed at the Presidency as a guest. The result—well, it is simple. I shall return with a regiment of soldiers and fetch the lady myself. Your charter will be cancelled, and your goods confiscated."

Dene laughed out loud and contemptuously.

"After that," he said, "you had better get out of Beau Desir as fast as your horse's legs will carry you. As to your lies, you can tell any you think fit. I bought Beau-Desir, and paid for it in hard cash, and I have sent the title deeds to the British Consul at Buenos Ayres. I am no rebel, and I have broken no part of my contract. If

you overrun my land with your soldiers, or attempt any act of force upon me or my people, you will wake up one morning to find an English war ship shelling San Martina, and your tinpot little city in ruins about your ears. As for the lady, understand me clearly. She is an Englishwoman, and I will take her under my protection. You touch her at your peril."

Rimarez, with clenched teeth, walked towards the door.

"It is to be war, then," he said, with quiet fury. "Very well. We will at least hear what the lady has to say."

"We will hear that," Dene said, also rising, "together. I shall come with you."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE CONFESSION OF TERNISSA

THEY crossed the open space together. Dene laid his hand upon his companion's arm.

"Understand this," he said shortly. "I am coming with you to hear from her own lips whether or no she desires to see you. If she is willing, I have no more to say; if she is unwilling, you mount your horse and ride away."

Rimarez laughed unpleasantly.

"Oh, she'll see me fast enough," he declared. "You need have no fear of that. I have the right. She will admit it."

"Her attitude towards you last night justified such a fear," Dene remarked. "At any rate, I shall hear what she has to say."

They had reached the door, and Rimarez knocked upon it with his riding-whip. For a moment there was no answer. Dene, who was standing by his side, fancied that he heard voices within her little sitting-room. But when in response to Rimarez' second and louder summons the door opened, she was alone.

She looked doubtfully from one to the other, and Dene, marking the instinctive apprehension with which she regarded the man who stood by his side, was glad that he had come. She ignored Ramirez after that first glance, and spoke directly to him.

"You wished to see me?" she asked softly. "Will you come inside?"

"It is Captain Ramirez," Dene answered, "who wished to speak with you. I was not sure whether his visit would be welcome to you. If you are content to receive him I will go away."

"I do not wish to have anything whatever to say to Captain Ramirez," she declared firmly. "I am very much obliged to you for your consideration, Mr. Dene. I hope that you will save me from the—insult of that man's presence."

Ramirez swore softly under his breath.

"A nice dutiful way to speak of your husband," he remarked quietly.

She flashed upon him a look of ineffable scorn. Dene stood still—for a moment, indeed, sensation seemed almost to have left him. It was true, then, this hideous thing. He had looked upon Ramirez' words last night as a mere piece of drunken folly, but his assurance this morning, and his calm repetition of them, now left him scarcely any room for doubt. Ramirez, of all men, to be her husband—drunkard, coward, bully! He was feverishly anxious to hear her deny it, but she was silent. There was a strange fire in her eyes and her bosom was heaving. But there was no denial.

"Come," Rimarez said, "tell Mr. Dene that he need not wait any longer. It is no one's place to interfere between husband and wife. I have something to say to you."

He moved forward, but she remained standing upon the threshold. She looked Dene steadily in the face.

"I want you both to come inside," she said. "I have something to say to Mr. Dene."

Rimarez flashed a black look upon her, but she was unconscious of it. They passed together into her sitting-room. To Dene's surprise it was empty. Yet he had certainly heard voices. He glanced around, puzzled. There was a door on the opposite side of the room, but it was closed. He looked away from it into Ternissa's face, and found that she was watching him.

If she divined his curiosity, she took no means to gratify it, and indeed the matter seemed altogether dwarfed into insignificance when he thought of that wonderful statement to which he had just listened. Ternissa did not ask them to sit down. She stood in the place to which she had moved on their first entrance, her hands hanging straight down, her head thrown back, and her lips quivering with emotion. Rimarez and Dene were standing as far away as possible, the former with a cynical smile upon his thin lips, but with certain signs of uneasiness in his restless eyes and nervously twitching fingers. Dene was very still and quiet, for the shock of this disclosure had been great.

"Mr. Dene," she said quietly, "I want to offer you a word or two of explanation. I want to do so in Captain Rimarez' presence."

"Unless you desire to do so," Dene answered, "it is not necessary."

"But I do desire it," she continued, with some vehemence. "I desire it very much. I want you to understand how it was that I ever made what would seem to be so pitiful a mistake."

She paused for a moment, and her eyes kindled as though with fire. Neither of them took any notice of the little sneer to which Ramirez had given utterance.

"He has told you," she continued, "that he is my husband. It is the truth. But fortunately for me I found out what manner of man he was even before we left the church. He has never since that moment held my hand—he never will."

"As to that," Ramirez interrupted fiercely, "we shall see."

"Captain Ramirez," she continued, "was introduced to me by the man who brought him to England, the man whose friend he professed to be—by Arnold Sagasta."

Dene gave vent to a little exclamation of surprise. Strangely enough, he had never thought of Sagasta in connection with her.

"He did me the very doubtful compliment," Ternissa continued, "of making love to me from the moment we met. It was a matter of indifference to him that I was betrothed to his friend. He set himself from the first to the task of creating misunderstandings between us. The means he used were beneath contempt; they were as hackneyed as they were sickening. I do not mean to dwell upon them. I am ashamed of having been deluded,

but I was. I broke off my engagement with Arnold in such terms that he would not even ask me for an explanation. Even now, though, I cannot understand myself what induced me to listen for a moment to that creature's pleadings"—she inclined her head scornfully in Ramirez' direction. "My life at the time was exceedingly uncomfortable. I was living with an aunt who had daughters of her own, and who looked upon me as a very inconvenient incubus. Then I am thankful to remember that he was, or appeared to be, a very different person in those days; and finally, I was still smarting bitterly under what I believed to be Arnold's treachery—I agreed to marry him, and we were married. But the ceremony was barely over before a trifling incident made everything clear to me. I drove from the church to my aunt's house, and until I landed at San Martina I had seen no more of Captain Ramirez. That is the story of my marriage."

"I admit all that my wife has said," Ramirez remarked coolly. "It is more or less true. I was very much in love with her, and I schemed a little to win her. This, however, does not alter the fact that she is my wife."

Ternissa ignored him altogether, and turned once more to Dene, whose eyes were fixed upon her full of grave sympathy.

"Now I want to tell you," she continued, "why I came to San Martina. That, too, is the result of Captain Ramirez' scheming, as he calls it. On their return to San Martina, he contrived to have Arnold arrested and imprisoned. Then he wrote me to England. Arnold, he said, was a prisoner under sentence of death. He was the

only man who could save him, and he would do so on one condition only—that I came out to San Martina secretly and alone and took up my position as his wife. I wrote that I would come, for by some means or other I had determined that Arnold must be saved. He had suffered enough through my folly, and I had made up my mind to go to any lengths to save him and get him out of the country. I made no promises, but I said that I would come, and I did. I arrived at San Martina, and I found that apparently it was as Captain Ramirez had said. I had made up my mind that if it were necessary for me to carry out my part of the sacrifice, it should be at the cost of my life. Whilst I was hesitating, making inquiries, and putting the end off as long as I could, Arnold Sagasta escaped. It was my release. I remembered your offer, and I came here.”

Dene turned towards Ramirez. There was a steely glitter in his eyes, and a note of suppressed passion in his tone.

“I give you ten minutes, Captain Ramirez,” he said, “to leave Beau Desir. I am a man of my word, mind. If you remain beyond that time it must be at your own risk.”

Eugène Ramirez shrugged his shoulders. There was an evil look in his white face.

“I am quite ready to go now,” he said ; “but I am going to take my property away with me.”

Dene faced him with a heavy frown.

“What do you mean?” he demanded.

Ramirez pointed to Ternissa. He had summoned up

what little stock of courage he possessed, but his outstretched forefinger was shaking nervously.

"My wife," he said. "If I used a little art to gain her, what matter? She belongs to me now. I insist upon it that she comes with me. I decline to leave the place without her."

CHAPTER XXIX

DOM PEDRO'S SCHEME

TERNISSA was clearly disconcerted at Eugène Rimarez' unexpected firmness. Yet in a moment or two she regained her composure. She looked towards him scornfully, and her eyes flashed with anger. Her tall figure seemed dilated with passion.

"You know very well," she cried, "that you are only wasting your breath. Nothing on this earth would induce me to go with you."

He laughed—a harsh, unpleasant little laugh, with more than a note of menace in it. Something new had crept into his manner. He had arrived at a determination. Ternissa was certainly very beautiful. He looked at her with ugly admiration.

"As to that," he said, "we will see. You are, after all, my wife. We were properly and legally married. You will save trouble to yourself and to your friends if you do at once as I bid you."

"Absolutely and for ever," she answered firmly, "I refuse."

He was not unduly depressed. He was slowly beginning

to see his way before him. With his hands in his pockets he lounged against the wall.

"Come," he said, "you had better be reasonable. You have given me the right to compel you to come. It is well. If you make me I shall use it. I mean what I say. Come, is it not reasonable? I cannot marry any one else. I am not content to be—what is it you call it,—a grass widower, nor will I permit my wife to be a schoolmistress in such a hole as this. Now prepare yourself. You are coming away with me."

"I am not," she cried passionately. "Oh, go away, go away!"

Then she turned to Dene, and he who had been waiting for a word or a look from her stepped forward.

"Captain Ramirez," he said, "you have already exceeded the limit of time I gave you. This lady is at liberty to do exactly as she chooses. She has chosen to remain here. That is sufficient."

"And I declare that she shall not remain here," Ramirez answered hotly. "She is my wife, and you have no right to interfere."

"I have at least the right to order you out of Beau Desir," Dene answered, "and for the third and last time I tell you to go."

Ramirez was white to the lips, but he turned towards the door.

"You are doing a very foolish thing," he said, pausing and looking at Ternissa. "You have chosen to defy me. You compel me to use force. Later you shall suffer for it. You would have found it better to have yielded quietly."

Dene was between them with fire flashing from his eyes.

"If you lay your little finger upon her," he said in a low tone, "I shall thrash you like a dog."

Rimarez laughed uneasily. He edged away a little nearer to the door.

"It is not," he said, "that sort of force which I propose to use. I will admit that you are too many for me single-handed. I shall return to San Martina, and when I come again it will be at the head of my regiment, and the man who hinders me shall be shot for a traitor. You like plain speaking. Is that plain enough for you?"

Dene opened the door with a gesture which made words unnecessary. Rimarez passed out. Ternissa followed him on to the piazza.

"Listen," she cried. "You see what I have here. It is a pistol. Sooner than suffer even the touch of your fingers I would use it. It may be for you or it may be for myself—perhaps for both. Mind, you are warned."

He laughed and mounted his horse, which one of Dene's men had brought round.

"I will risk even that," he said. "Anything, rather than leave you here—for him."

He touched his horse with the spurs and galloped away. Ternissa, whose cheeks were burning, stepped past Dene into her cottage. On the threshold she paused. She looked round at Dene and held out her hands to him.

"You are very good to me," she said. "You have done more for me than I deserve. I only hope that you will not suffer for it."

Dene took her hands in his and looked down upon her with a smile.

"There is no fear of that," he answered her. "It is not within the power of that rascal to work any harm upon us."

"He means to try," she said anxiously.

Dene shrugged his shoulders.

"He may try if he likes," he said. "He is foolish enough, and he is hot-headed. But, after all, it is no matter. We can look very well after our own safety and yours."

"I shall owe you more than I can ever repay," she said gratefully.

"You will do nothing of the sort," he answered promptly. "Leaving out every personal consideration, you are our countrywoman, and there is not one of my men who would not count it his duty to protect you. Remember, please, that you are perfectly safe here so long as you choose to stay."

* * * * *

She was married to Eugène Rimarez—braggart, coward, and drunkard. That was the thought which Dene carried about with him everywhere throughout that busy day. He was astonished to find in how small a degree his discovery seemed to depress him. His chief sensation was one of genuine pity. She was a very beautiful woman, and the fact of her propinquity had certainly produced a certain effect upon him. He had admired her; the fact of her coming to Beau Desir had been a pleasure to him. Beyond that she had certainly attained no dominance over his

thoughts. He was prepared to stand by her, to risk the safety of his people, if necessary, for her protection. She was an English lady, and her nationality and sex were alike obligations upon him. Apart from this, he was aware of a certain fascination which she had exercised over him, against which he had chafed, but which he had nevertheless experienced. These disclosures of Ramirez would at least definitely determine their relations. He told himself this with a certain amount of relief. It was a proof to him that he had never seriously been the least in love with her. He was glad of it. He brushed the subject away from his mind with an undoubted sense of relief.

All day long he was in the saddle. He rode from point to point of the great harvest plain, prompt with his orders, as keen a watcher as Angus himself over the small army of toilers. Higher and higher mounted the sun, but Dene knew no fatigue. The great wheels whirled, and the field of gold grew smaller and smaller. Long ribbons of fallen corn stretched from end to end. There was not a spot which Dene did not himself visit. Only once did a word fall from his lips which had no reference to the day's labours, and that was when he found the place where Dom Pedro had been working empty, and Dom Pedro himself nowhere to be seen. He called to Angus, who was only a few yards off.

"Where is Dom Pedro?" he asked. "He was working here this morning."

The foreman shook his head.

"Gone clean daft, I'm thinking," he answered. "He was talking to himself for an hour or more, with a face as

black as night, and at last he went clean awa' with ne'er a word to nobody. He'll be somewhere in the settlement for sure, but he's no' here. Every mon's work is worth gold to-day."

"Perhaps," Dene suggested, "he has gone to help the new schoolmistress. I told him to do so if he thought it necessary."

"Maybe," Angus answered, "but I'm thinking that she'll not need much help. She's the face of a scholar, and a taking way with the children."

"If you hear of Dom Pedro," Dene said, wheeling round his horse, "let me know."

But neither man nor woman in Beau Desir saw the face of Dom Pedro any more that day.

* * * * *

He was miles away up in the mountains with Sagasta. They had met as old friends, and Dom Pedro, wearied with his climb, yet full of his mission, lay under the pine trees and smoked a long black cigar.

"There are five hundred rifles," he was saying, "all of the best pattern, and cartridges enough for an army. Not a soul in Beau Desir knows of the river-bed pass; they are to be had for the asking. There is only one person to be won over, the schoolmistress; and I think, my friend, that you can find the means."

Sagasta looked through a little cloud of blue smoke down into the valley.

"She can scarcely refuse me," he murmured. "Yet she will hate to deceive Dene."

"It is no time for us," Dom Pedro said, "to consider other people. It is our only hope. To-night you must see her."

"They are in the schoolroom," Sagasta said thoughtfully.

"They are in the schoolroom, and she has the key," Dom Pedro said. "Now I must go, or Dene will be searching for me. I have told you of Eugène Ramirez and of the rifles. It is for you to act."

CHAPTER XXX

THE DAYS OF TOIL

THE days which followed were the hardest which the dwellers in Beau Desir had ever known. Of leisure they had none. When darkness came and labour out of doors was impossible, a very brief rest now took the place of those long dreamy evenings of song and love-making, which to Ternissa had seemed so idyllic. Marie grew pale, and a wistful light shone in Pietro's dark eyes. His guitar hung idle upon the shelf. The hours which had been so sweet to both of them were spent now by Pietro with a cartridge-belt around his waist and a rifle over his shoulder. Dene was not slow to recognise the fact that his position might at any moment become a dangerous one. Rimarez was a virulent enemy; if he carried out his threat and attempted to take Ternissa by force, Dene's resistance would become an act of open rebellion against the State. At any rate, if there was to be fighting, Dene made up his mind to provide a little surprise for his assailants. The cases of rifles were unpacked and ammunition served out; every night till the moon rose Dene drilled his men on part of the stubbly plain which had so lately been a sea of gold. There were

one or two old soldiers amongst them who entered eagerly into the spirit of the thing, and made excellent serjeants. The men themselves, tired though they were with their day's labour, did their best, and their best was good. A week passed, and there were no signs of molestation.

All the time Dene avoided Ternissa. Sometimes at night he had seen her come out from her little wooden house and stand upon the piazza with her white face turned towards the hills. Once he had watched her change her position so that she could see right into the little room where he was sitting. He was near enough then to see that her cheeks were hollow, and that her eyes were more than ordinarily brilliant, with a wistful, haunting light. She was suffering, without a doubt. Yet he made no movement towards her.

One night as he rode homeward after the nightly drill he came face to face with a stranger, who had apparently issued from her house. The man wore a slouch-hat with wide brim and a short riding-cloak; and at first Dene, who had pulled up his horse to intercept him, had no idea who it was. He accosted him, in fact, as a stranger.

"Have you business with me?" he asked. "I am Gregory Dene of Beau Desir."

The man took off his hat, and a stray gleam of moonlight lit up his face.

"Known in the old days," he remarked, smiling, "as Greg of Magdalen. No; I have no business with you. I have been to see Miss Denison."

Dene frowned heavily.

"I cannot have you here at all, Sagasta," he said firmly. "Personally I have no quarrel with you, but you know how

you stand with President Rimarez, and I have no mind to see my lands confiscated and my people cast adrift. I do not wish to make use of any threats towards you, but you must keep clear of Beau Desir."

Sagasta turned upon Dene a face as dark as his own.

"Your hospitality, Dene," he remarked bitterly, "overpowers me. I should like you to clearly understand that I do not come to see you or any of your people. I scarcely see that I am involving you in any risk in paying an occasional visit to Miss Denison."

"I am the best judge of that," Dene answered, "and I forbid your presence here."

Sagasta leaned against the tree under which they had met and lit a cigarette. He was heedless alike of Dene's outstretched finger pointing towards the hills and of the growing impatience in his manner.

"This evening," he said, "I must admit that my visit had a special object. I wanted to be perfectly assured that Eugène Rimarez had left you."

"He has gone to San Martina," Dene answered shortly. "He will never return here."

"But," Sagasta remarked, "for your stupid obstinacy—and permit me to add pluck—he would never have returned anywhere. As it is, his days are most certainly numbered. His death is a solemn charge upon my conscience."

For a moment Dene was silent. After all, was not the death of Rimarez a thing rather to be desired? Then he became conscious of Sagasta's close but half-covert observation, and he stifled the feeling.

"His murder has been attempted before," Dene said.

"Understand me, that if he is killed on my land and I discover his assailant, I shall hang him forthwith—even though that man should be you."

Sagasta laughed bitterly.

"You are not in a pleasant temper this evening, my dear Dene," he said.

"It is no matter of temper, I assure you, Sagasta," was the prompt reply. "Only understand me thus far, if you can. My whole life is bound up in the success of this enterprise of mine. I will not have it endangered. Already Rimarez is our bitter enemy because I refused to give Ternissa up to him. I am not going to make an enemy also of his father by harbouring you. I know nothing of the politics of San Martina, and I care less. Revolt if you like, start a revolution if you want to, but don't drag me into it."

"Amongst your people," Sagasta said, "are some outcasts from San Martina. I should like to speak with them."

"You shall not."

Sagasta, who up till now had reserved a sort of cynical equanimity, turned upon Dene with a momentary burst of scorn.

"Dene," he cried, "you are a renegade and a turncoat. You were always a friend of liberty in the old days. You have talked socialism in your time. You have professed yourself to be the friend of the democracy. It was I who brought you into touch with the people. It was I who showed you where the great heart of the world was beating. In those days you were my disciple. You were

as eager for reform, as keen for liberty as the most ardent of us. Yet here in this country you range yourself on the side of a rotten and corrupt Government. You have the chance to strike a blow for freedom, and self-interest restrains you. The Government of San Martina is a base and despicable sham. The public offices are sold; the people are cruelly taxed to support an army to overawe them and to provide luxuries for a few idle, dissolute men."

Dene's face was troubled. He answered slowly—

"There may be some truth in what you say, Sagasta, but I am sure that it is not so bad as all that. I do not believe that the President is wholly to blame either."

"What do you suppose," Sagasta asked, "became of the money which you paid for Beau Desir?"

"I can tell you that," Dene answered. "It has gone to make a Government grant towards a scheme for free education."

"It is a lie," Sagasta declared. "One-third of it went to buy rifles and ammunition, which could only be bought for cash down, and the remainder was divided between settling up the back pay of the army, and the private purse of Rimarez and his creatures. This I know for a fact. You are the ally of one of the rottenest administrations which ever misgoverned a people."

"These things may be," Dene answered, "and even then, whichever way my own sympathies might point, I decide to remain neutral unless I am attacked by either side."

"You have not the heart of a man!" Sagasta cried

bitterly. "You do not dare to strike a single blow for a just cause."

"I have a duty above even that," Dene answered. "Supposing for a moment that all you have told me is true. I have brought these people out here, and their welfare is absolutely my first thought. They have given themselves into my keeping. They themselves represent in their own persons long years of oppression and injustice. There may lie upon me a general responsibility to resist tyranny wherever I may find it, but I have also a more direct and personal responsibility as regards the welfare of those who have trusted me. That is my answer to you, Sagasta, and it is final."

"Our friendship, then," Sagasta cried, "is at an end."

"For the present," Dene answered, "we had better consider it so. I believe you to be honest, Arnold, and I am sorry that I should be forced to say these things to you. But understand me clearly: I do not want you in Beau Desir, and I will not have you here. Now I have finished all I have to say. Will you go, or shall I have to use other means?"

Sagasta laughed scornfully.

"You are an old woman, Dene, without the heart of a chicken. Come! What if I decide to stay here?"

"This," Dene answered. "I shall make a prisoner of you and send you under escort to San Martina. It would be the wisest course for me in any case, for it would settle your revolution, and it would ensure peace in San Martina."

Sagasta moved a few steps away to where a small

mountain pony was tethered, and swung his leg over the saddle.

"You have had your chance, Dene," he said briefly. "I give you notice that from henceforth the memory of our friendship is dead. You are my enemy, and I shall treat you as such."

He galloped away up the steep slope, and Dene turned towards the settlement. But almost immediately he pulled his mare on to her haunches. There was the rustling of a woman's gown through the bushes; Ternissa stood by his side.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE TREASURE IN THE SCHOOL-HOUSE

DENE dismounted at once, and greeted her with some surprise. The last few days seemed to have effected a curious change in her. The reserve with which she had treated him was gone. Her eyes, as she raised them to his, were appealing for his sympathy. A slight flush came into her pale cheeks as he touched her fingers.

"I have not seen you," she said, "since—that night."

"We have been so busy with the harvest," he explained, with an attempt at cheerfulness. "Besides——"

"Never mind," she interrupted. "I have wanted to see you to ask you one thing. I waited for you to-night. I must know it. You must answer me truthfully."

She seemed consumed by a sort of nervous anxiety. Her eyes never left his face. He remained silent, waiting for her to proceed.

"Since you heard—my story, you have avoided me. You have not been near; you have left me wholly to myself. Is it because you despise me?"

"You know me better than that," he answered reproachfully.

"Indeed!" she murmured; "I thought so. Yet—you have avoided me."

"You have had another visitor," he remarked gravely.

"Yes. Arnold has been down here twice. I heard you talking to him just now."

"I am very sorry," he said, "to have to stop his visits."

"You need not be," she answered, "if you will accept the responsibility of keeping him away."

"I am afraid," he said, "that I do not understand."

"It is so simple. I cannot exist without a single soul to speak to. You must come and talk to me sometimes."

"That I shall be very glad to do," he assured her. "To tell you the truth, I imagined that I should be obeying your wishes by keeping away."

"You were wrong," she said softly. "I like to have you come. You have been kinder to me than any one else in the world."

He looked at her doubtfully; her tone and whole bearing towards him had changed so completely since that day in San Martina. She raised her eyes to his, and he experienced a curious little thrill of emotion. For the moment he forgot everything except that she was a marvellously beautiful woman, that in the dim light her hair glimmered like threads of deep gold, that the perfume from those flowers in her waistband was very sweet. He held out his hand. She took it and leaned over towards him; her other hand was upon his coat-sleeve. For a full moment he hesitated. The light in her eyes was very soft and very inviting. Then he pulled himself together and dropped her fingers.

"It has made me very happy," he said quietly, "to help you in any way."

A swift change passed across her face ; her lips trembled and her eyes flashed. If Dene had been watching her altered expression it would have puzzled him.

"You have done more for me," she said, "than I have the least right to expect. You have done so much that I cannot accept anything more."

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed cheerfully.

"I heard what you said to Arnold Sagasta," she went on, "about the danger of sheltering him. The same applies to me. Eugène Rimarez will work some mischief upon you if I remain here. I heard him threaten it, and he means to keep his word."

"We are not afraid of Eugène Rimarez," he answered promptly. "You are perfectly safe here. Every countryman of yours in Beau Desir is your natural protector here. You may trust to us."

She shook her head.

"I am not going to bring trouble upon you," she said. "I have been too selfish already. I shall go away."

He smiled.

"May I ask—in what direction?"

She pointed vaguely to the shadowy pine-crested Andiguas.

"Up there—in the mountains," she said.

"To Sagasta?"

"Yes."

He looked at her gravely. She met his eyes defiantly.

"Why not? I have been betrothed to him for years.

My marriage with Rimarez was a ceremony only. It could never be anything else. Would you have me bound by it all my life?"

"I do not know," he answered gravely. "At least, I think that you would be very unwise to go to Sagasta at present."

"Perhaps so. Perhaps—I do not want to go. But on the other hand, I have a claim on him. I have none on you, and if I stay here I am a source of danger to Beau Desir, and to you."

"You are," he murmured under his breath.

She might have heard him, for her eyes softened and she laughed in his face.

"You know what it will mean," she continued. "Eugène will bring soldiers—if you resist there will be bloodshed. You may be treated as rebels. I heard you talking to Arnold; I know how you feel about your people. I will not remain here to bring this danger upon you."

He interrupted her.

"Arnold Sagasta is one person," he said; "you are another. Nothing is of any account against your safety—not even my people's welfare; not even my life."

And again there was that dangerous silence broken once more by the music of her laughter; only the laughter was not quite natural, and the electricity lingered in the air.

"You are delightful," she said, "but you are not honest. I am no more to you than any one of your people. I am merely a unit. In your heart you cannot think it worth while to risk the safety of the whole for one."

"You are at least," he answered, "a countrywoman, and I will see Beau Desir in flames before I give you up."

She looked at him long and searchingly, and he met her gaze without flinching. Then she sighed a little impatiently.

"Ah well!" she said, "at present we will not speak of this again."

"You have made up your mind to go," he exclaimed.

"Not to-night, at any rate. I shall wait for developments. To-morrow—well, we shall see."

"You are talking lightly," he said, "but I know what you mean. You will go to-morrow or the first opportunity. Listen. Sagasta is in danger up there. He has few followers, and his hiding-place is known. Ramirez is certain to send out men to capture him. If you are discovered there you would be in terrible danger. It is not to be thought of."

She shrugged her shoulders. Behind them came the sound of footsteps and voices. It was the hour for labour to cease, and already the workers were hastening home from the fields.

"You must go," she said. "You will only just have time for dinner and a rest if you are going to drill to-night. By the bye, what an odd place you have found for your rifles and ammunition in my schoolroom."

"I hope they are not in your way," Dene remarked. "We really had no other safe place for them. It was a question of there or in the chapel."

"I am glad," she said, "that you have chosen the lesser sacrilege!"

"Rifles out here," Dene continued, "are like gold in more civilised places. The schoolroom is in the centre of the place, and has a strong lock on the door. Besides, the windows are so high that it cannot be broken into except through your house."

"Surely there are no burglars amongst the elect of Beau Desir," she laughed.

Dene shook his head.

"Scarcely. No, I was not concerned about any one in Beau Desir."

She waited as though for him to explain, but he abandoned the subject.

"I want you to promise me something," he said.

"Well?"

"You will not leave Beau Desir without letting me know?"

She lifted her eyes to his.

"Do you really wish me to promise that?"

"Of course I do," he insisted.

"You are sure—that you care?"

"It is obvious that I do," he answered gravely.

"Then I promise."

CHAPTER XXXII

THE PRESIDENT AND LUCIA

ON the next day it seemed certain to Dene that what he had been fearing had come to pass. The alarm was given early in the evening. He had just returned from a long day's work, and, after a bath and change of clothes, was smoking a pipe on the piazza, when a little movement in the place attracted his notice. Juan was pointing towards the pass—others were following with their eyes his outstretched fingers. There was a murmur of tongues, in which was apparent a note of anxiety. Dene stood up, and, reaching for his glasses, looked steadily along the mountain road towards San Martina.

Almost at the same moment there was a puff of white smoke and a rifle-shot—the sentry at the pass was announcing the arrival of strangers. It was a company of soldiers, as Dene had feared from the first. The red and yellow uniforms were only too easily to be distinguished—the colours of Rimarez' regiment, the body-guard of the President. They were as yet too far off for him to tell whether Rimarez himself was there, but he knew at once that they were the men of his own

especial regiment. Dene laid down his glasses and strode out into the place. Dom Pedro, whose eyes were on fire with the lust and joy of fighting, met him there.

"Many of our men are still abroad and lingering on their homeward way," he said. "Shall I ring the bell to hurry them in?"

Dene nodded.

"Yes. Ring it at once, and let me have the keys of the schoolhouse. I want every man to be within call."

Then he turned to Angus and old Serjeant Stewart, who stood close at hand.

"There must be no signs of any hostile reception," he said quickly. "Let every man, so far as possible, be prepared, but let him keep inside his own house. There is no need for a muster; we do not know yet what their errand may be. It is not at all certain that they mean fighting at all. Let no arms be shown."

He crossed the Place again and stood before Ternissa's door. She opened it at once; apparently she was ready for flight.

"There is no cause for immediate alarm," he said quickly. "There are soldiers coming, but only a handful. It may be a message from the President."

"They have come," she said, "for me. If you refuse to give me up they will send for reinforcements. Beau Desir will be sacked and ruined. No; I will not have you resist. I ought to have gone away before. I am going now."

"You will go—to Sagasta?" he cried.

"Yes."

The mournfulness of her answer fired him with a sudden passion.

"You shall not," he exclaimed. "We are strong enough to hold you, and we will. I would rather see you dead."

Her eyes flashed with a wonderful fire. She held out her hands.

"Now you speak like a man," she said softly. "I am not afraid of death. I will stay and see what befalls."

He drew a long breath. Such moments as this seemed to him to be bringing them closer together. Yet even then there was something about her manner which perplexed him. A thought had come to him of which he was ashamed.

The sound of hurrying feet behind reminded him that the crisis must now be close at hand.

"Lock yourself up," he said. "I will come back to you with the news."

The little cavalcade was close at hand. Dene took up the glasses which he had left hanging over the verandah, anxious only to see whether one man was there. Almost as he raised them to his eyes a little murmur filled the air from those around him.

"A woman. There is a woman riding there."

"It is the beautiful young Signorina."

Dene, whose relief was great, threw away his glasses and waved his hat."

"Pass the word round to disarm," he cried. "Tell every one to come out. And, Angus, go and tell Dom Pedro to stop that infernal clanging. It is the President and his daughter. There will be no fighting. It is a friendly visit."

He sprang upon the nearest horse and galloped up the steep ascent towards the advancing party. It was indeed the President and Lucia who rode a few yards in front of the small body of soldiers, and the visit was obviously a pacific one. The President was not even in uniform. He wore a riding-suit of brown holland and a broad-brimmed planter's hat. He was smoking, as usual, a long cigar, and his appearance was more that of an English country gentleman making a leisurely tour around the world than the much maligned dictator of a bankrupt and insurgent State. By his side rode Lucia in a white serge habit and English straw hat, mounted on a small thoroughbred horse which she managed with consummate ease and grace. As Dene rode up to them, hat in hand, her dark eyes met his face, anxious to see whether indeed he was glad to see them. She had secretly been delighted at the prospect of coming, but none the less, the excursion had not been of her planning. Dene's welcome left no possible doubt as to its genuineness. Lucia gave him her hand with a little sigh of relief, and a very eloquent gleam in her dark eyes.

"This is kind indeed of you, President," Dene exclaimed. "Welcome most heartily to Beau Desir. You could not have given me a more pleasant surprise."

Consciously or unconsciously, it was at this moment that he glanced towards Lucia, whose dark eyes fell for a moment before his and who blushed with pleasure. Dene, whose joy at seeing his visitors sprung chiefly from another cause, still found himself once more experiencing that curious thrill of interest which Lucia had from the first awakened in him. She was most wonderfully fresh and handsome. Usually,

too, she was so self-possessed that the slight shyness with which she raised her eyes to his and returned his greeting was more than ever attractive. The President was contemplating his crushed fingers, smiling affably enough, but secretly wishing that this young Englishman's grip was a shade less hearty.

"You are very kind, Senor Dene," he said "I have for some time desired to see your little domain which you have, I am told, made so very productive. I trust that my daughter's coming will not inconvenience you in any way?"

"On the contrary," Dene declared, "the coming of Miss Lucia is the greatest pleasure which you could have afforded me."

Lucia's eyes were soft with delight. She flashed a quick sweet glance at him, and rode on with a smile parting her lips.

"I suppose though," Dene continued, "I ought to remind you that I have no luxuries to offer. It will be very much like camping out, I am afraid. You are an old soldier, President, so I know that I need offer you no apologies."

"And I am his daughter," Lucia exclaimed quickly. "Besides," she added in a lower tone, "you know that I like simple things best."

"Then I am quite sure," Dene said smiling, "that we can please you. Don't you think our situation beautiful?"

"I think that it is altogether the most picturesque place I have ever seen," she answered. "You have those lovely

blue mountains to look at all day long. I never saw such colouring."

The President laughed.

"My daughter," he remarked, "is before anything else an artist. Beauty is what first appeals to her. She forgets that for you and your people at least there are more important things in life than gazing at mountains and watching colour effects. But apart from the picturesque point of view, Senor Dene, I must admit that the situation of your settlement is admirably chosen. A few field pieces and plenty of ammunition and you could defy an army."

Dene smiled. The President had somewhat exposed himself. His visit had doubtless other motives save those of pure friendliness.

"Neither of those things unfortunately," he remarked, "do we possess. But, indeed, I hope that there may never be any occasion for anything of that sort. My men are workers, not fighting men."

"You have, I suppose, no arms for them?" the President remarked.

"There are a few rifles about, I believe," Dene rejoined carelessly, "but I doubt if one out of ten of my men could hit a haystack. By the way, President, how are things in San Martina? Quieter, I hope?"

"The rising is suppressed and everything proceeds as before," the President answered, with satisfaction. "The revolution is at an end. There is only one thing I desire to ensure a permanent peace."

"And that is?"

"The hanging of Sagasta," the President said firmly.

"The fact that he is alive and in hiding unsettles some of the people."

Lucia shuddered and Dene's face clouded over.

"Do not let us talk about anything so unpleasant before Miss Lucia!" he said lightly. "This is to be a holiday visit. In Beau Desir we have no politics."

"By the bye," the President asked abruptly, "why were we greeted with such an extraordinary clamour of bells from that little chapel of yours? The steeple almost rocked, and your men came in from the fields like creatures possessed."

"Oh, it—was the Vespers bell," Dene said coolly. "We have a great many Roman Catholics here."

The President smiled and stroked his grey imperial thoughtfully.

"Your priest," he remarked, "is a man of energy. It was more like an alarm bell or a call to arms."

Dene did not pursue the subject. Fortunately for him it was scarcely possible, for they were entering the Place, thronged now with the entire population of Beau Desir. Many curious faces were turned towards the little company. The men were not quite certain what to do. Dene rose in his stirrups.

"My friends," he said, in a clear, firm tone, "the President of San Martina and his daughter have honoured us with a visit. Will you not let them hear what an English greeting is like?"

A storm of cheers and hurrahs broke forth. The President sat bareheaded upon his horse. Lucia bent forward with a brilliant smile upon her lips, very happy to be there with Dene by her side. There was a little murmur of

something like admiration from amongst the womenkind. The sullenness seemed to have passed altogether from the girl's face, and she was radiantly beautiful. Even Dene, as he swung her lightly from the saddle, felt that life in San Martina had suddenly become a more interesting thing.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE SONG OF DEATH

A MAN had halted in the centre of a little grove of pine trees to listen to the singing of a bird. It was late in the evening, and the breeze which had stolen down from the Andiguas a few hours before had gradually died away. The tops of the trees were absolutely motionless—through the canopy of delicately interlaced leaves the moonlight came streaming down and lay all about him in brilliant yellow patches. The undergrowth around was alive with insect noises; a yard or two behind, hidden away snugly amongst the bushes, a landrail was filling the air with his own peculiar ideas of melody. The man had just lit a cigarette, and a great black and yellow moth came fluttering around the match which burned still in his long white fingers. He held it carefully at arm's length until the insect with singed wings fell to the ground at his feet, then he set his foot upon it with a faint smile. The night bird was singing all the time.

Captain Eugène Ramirez leaned with his back against a tree listening. He was, after all, in the ordinary sense of the

word by no means an ill-looking man. He was of medium height only, but he was slim and well shaped. Just now the flush of wine—which he chanced to have been drinking in moderation only—upon his usually pale cheeks gave him a not unbecoming colour. He was wearing the picturesque uniform of his regiment without an overcoat, for the night was hot and he had left his servant a mile or so away on the road to lead down into Beau Desir a lamed horse and his baggage.

As the bird's song grew louder his eyes became softer. He came almost to a standstill. Below him through the trees twinkled the lights of Beau Desir. He listened, and the cruel curl of his lips relaxed—he was giving himself up to the æsthetic delight of the little stream of melody so delicately in accord with his surroundings. He was so absorbed, indeed, that he did not hear a dry twig snap in the path a few yards away. He was absolutely unconscious that he was not alone until a voice almost in his ear greeted him.

“Good evening, Captain Ramirez.”

Rimarez thought no more of the beauty of the night. He turned round with face as white as a sheet and found himself confronted with the one man on earth whom least of any other he desired to see. It was Sagasta who had broken in upon his reverie.

“Arnold,” he exclaimed breathlessly. “Santa Maria.”

He looked around uneasy and desperate, cursing the chance which had brought him here into the presence of his worst enemy unarmed and defenceless. Sagasta's smile was pleasart and he was perfectly at his ease, but Ramirez

had a quick instinct and he knew at once that he was in grievous straits.

"You are surprised to see me, Eugène. Well, that is natural. It is this wonderful moonlight which showed you to me when you left the track by the pass. I scarcely dared to hope," Sagasta added grimly, "that we might meet again so soon."

Rimarez looked around and cursed the loneliness of the spot, cursed his empty hip pocket and his infernal luck. Then he made an effort to carry matters with a high hand.

"You had better stand aside and let me pass, Sagasta," he said. "There is no need for us to quarrel. My business in Beau Desir has nothing to do with you."

But Sagasta did not move from the centre of the path, and Rimarez, after a glance into his face, felt something akin to despair. His knees began to shake together and his heart to beat with most unaccustomed violence. He gave a little gasp for breath.

"Arnold," he cried, "you are too bitter against me. You are indeed. It was not I who betrayed you to the President. He found a letter of yours. I had the narrowest escape myself. When you escaped I was busy making plans to set you free. You are mistaken when you think that it was I who betrayed you. It was not indeed. I can prove it."

Sagasta listened, but remained unimpressed. He turned his cigar round in his fingers and finally, as though not finding it to his liking, he threw it away into the thicket.

"Anything else?" he asked tersely.

The flush of wine faded away from the cheeks of his listener and a cold sweat broke out upon his forehead.

"I know—what it is," he faltered. "You are thinking—of Ternissa?"

No answer. Rimarez laughed a hollow little laugh.

"What is it you say in England—that all is fair in war and love. Well, I played you a mean trick. I know it. I confess. But I loved her. I could never have won her—any other way. Come. I cannot undo it. She is mine. Be reasonable. I could not give her up. She is mine. I married her. She is my wife."

"To-night," Sagasta remarked pleasantly, "she will be your widow. Anything else?"

Rimarez' face was livid now with fear. His eyes seemed starting out of his head. He opened his lips to cry out, but a hand was suddenly set like a seal upon his mouth.

"Are you going—to murder me?" he spluttered.

Sagasta shook his head.

"Well, no," he said. "I object to that term in any case. It is no murder to shoot vermin, and that is about what you represent in humanity. I did mean, I must confess, to shoot you on sight, as I meant to hang you last time we met, and should have done but for that fool Gregory Dene. It would be only justice, but it goes against the grain. I'm used to all sorts of fighting, and I like it on the square. You are going to have a chance for your life—the chance of taking mine."

"I do not want your life," Rimarez faltered, "and for myself, I am not fit to die."

"You are not fit to live, Eugène Rimarez," was the stern

reply. "You have deceived and lied to women who trusted you. You have played the traitor to your friends. You have never spared the innocent or considered anything else under the sun except your own selfish pleasure, and for these things, my friend, you are about to die."

"Arnold—listen," Rimarez pleaded. "I will get a divorce."

"Heaven itself will proclaim that divorce before many minutes are past," Sagasta answered. "Now listen. I am not going to shoot you like a dog. Here is a spare pistol and some cartridges. I am going to walk to that tree over yonder. When I see that you are loaded and you raise your arm I shall fire—not before. You need not hurry. I shall wait for you."

Rimarez' hands were trembling so that he held the pistol like a dazed thing. Sagasta retreated for about ten paces to the place at which he had pointed, and then wheeled round. Rimarez had made no movement.

"If you are not ready in thirty seconds," Sagasta said, in a still, cold voice, "I shall fire. At least if you have lived like a cur, try to die like a man."

Rimarez fumbled with his pistol. The night bird, who had paused in his song, suddenly recommenced to sing. The breathless air was full once more of melody. White and gasping, the man whose death sentence had been pronounced lifted his left hand to his forehead and wiped away the sweat. He thought how contented he had been only half an hour ago, steeped in the sensuous enjoyment of his surroundings and with the warm exhilaration of a flask of fine claret still in his veins. The world, after all, was such a

fair place, pleasure was so sweet, and death—death—who so unfit to die as he? A mist swam before his eyes.

"Mercy!" he cried. "Mercy! I will make amends. I will begin a new life."

"When I count three I fire," came the clear answer. "One!"

"I never harmed you willingly. I dare not die. Give me half an hour at least."

"Two!"

Sagasta's tone was smooth and merciless—he stood there like an image of fate. The despair of death had already seized his victim.

"You fiend," he cried, and raised his pistol.

"Three!"

The two shots rang out almost together. There was a line of yellow fire between the men and a little cloud of white smoke. Sagasta took off his peaked hat and looked at the hole in it with a faint smile.

"The fellow pulled himself together," he muttered. "That was a close thing."

Then with the smoking pistol still in his hand he walked over to the huddled-up figure lying across the path. There was a small bullet hole through his coat exactly over his heart. A single spot of blood was slowly welling its way out. Sagasta looked down at him thoughtfully, looked down into the white convulsed features and livid face.

"Straight into your false heart as God's vengeance, Eugène Rimarez," he said softly. "I thought that my hand could never fail when you and I stood face to face at last."

He touched the body with his feet as though it were an

unclean thing. Then he threw his pistol into the thicket and stood listening intently. There was no sound of any human voice or movement, but from deeper in the plantation came the fainter note of the night bird, beginning a new song to the white morning.

CHAPTER XXXIV

A NIGHT OF DREAMS

“**I** THINK,” Lucia said, softly, “that this is the most peaceful place on earth. Would one ever believe that San Martina was less than a day’s journey away!”

They were sitting out on the piazza watching the moon rise slowly over the crest of the dark Andiguas. A table by their side was piled with fruit, and Brown had just handed round little Dresden cups of perfectly made coffee. Dene was by no means a sybarite, but his establishment had proved quite equal to the unexpected demands upon it. Dinner had been served in such a manner as to inspire the President with considerably more respect than he had yet felt for this eccentric Englishman. After all, the man, whose cellar was evidently chosen with nice taste and who possessed in this out-of-the-way spot a cook equal to his own, was not altogether a fool. Lucia, more indifferent to these things, was yet extremely happy. Dene had been thoughtfulness itself so far as regards her comfort, and his pleasure at entertaining them was apparent. Perhaps, though, the acme of her enjoyment was reached during the last few minutes. Out here the air was so cool and soft.

There was so much that was pleasant to look upon and sweet to hear. Away on the first ridge of the mountains the fireflies were swarming, little specks of gold darting backwards and forwards, "glowing and fading and glowing," like shooting stars across a black cloud. Up higher was the rim of a yellow moon slowly gathering strength, and all around was the pleasant hum of voices, the tinkling of Pietro's guitar, and the light badinage of all the young people in the place, rejoicing in this unexpected holiday from their nightly drill. Very soft and very sweet were many of those voices. Lucia half closed her eyes, and San Martina seemed far away indeed,—San Martina with its hateful babel of night sounds, the wrangling and the cursing, the tramp of patrolling soldiers, and an occasional revolver shot, followed by that shrill, heart-sickening cry—grim and significant. This was so different a life. Her delicately shaped white hand, flashing with jewels, was hanging over the side of her chair nearest to Dene. Accidentally he touched it with his own. Attracted by its soft, quivering magnetism, he found his fingers almost involuntarily closing over it. The pressure was faintly returned. She half opened her eyes and they smiled up at him. She was perfectly happy.

Meanwhile the President smoked his excellent cigar, and pondered over many matters not in the least sentimental. He wondered how much it would cost to live in some small continental place within easy reach of Paris, where there were no revolutions, no discontented ministers, nor any stray bullets crashing through the windows or flying about the streets. He wondered how much could be

squeezed out of the treasury at a pinch, how much corn those mighty sheds across the yellow plain there held, and whether if it were tactfully proposed to his host, he might be inclined to consider the matter of a loan of the Government. Money must be raised somehow, and the means were not exactly clear to him. There were taxes which he had promised should be remitted, treasury bills which he had been forced to give, but which he had not the faintest idea how to meet, and other such uncomfortable matters which he felt must soon, unless some Providence intervened, bring matters to a crisis. But as he sipped his very excellent liqueur and became more subject to the soothing influences of one of Dene's finest cigars, he gradually began to take a more roseate view of things. After all, these things were little inconveniences to which Presidents of bankrupt States are obviously liable. It was not wise for him just now to assume too gloomy a mien. He was a man, curiously enough, of some latent humour, and there was a certain amount of piquancy in his position. He shook himself free from forebodings, and decided that it was an opportune moment to broach the principal object of his visit.

"You will be glad to hear, Senor Dene," he began, "that San Martina is now perfectly quiet."

"I am very pleased to hear it indeed," Dene answered.

"You come," the President continued, "fresh from such a highly civilised and law-abiding country that your recent impressions of San Martina must have been, to say the least of it, disturbing."

"Things were certainly—a little lively there when I left," Dene murmured.

"I would like you to understand," the President declared, "that the normal state of the city is—very different. The recent disturbances have been due to the evil influence of one man, and one man only. Up there," he continued, pointing with his cigar towards the mountains, "lies concealed the only man who is still a source of danger to us."

Dene pulled himself together quickly. It was necessary to be on his guard.

"Sagasta," he remarked.

The President nodded.

"Yes. Eugène has told me of your expedition there in search of him. He has found a strong hiding-place, I understand."

"Very," Dene assented. "Your son and I had a narrow escape. I daresay he has told you about it?"

"Eugène himself had a narrow escape," the President answered, "but there was no danger for you, surely! Sagasta is a fellow countryman of yours, and an old acquaintance, I believe?"

"He is a fellow-countryman, and we were once on terms of friendship," Dene admitted slowly. "I will be frank with you, President. I do not believe that I was in any particular danger on the occasion to which we were referring. At the same time, I saved your son's life at the risk of my own."

"Eugène did not mention it," he said slowly.

"You will permit me then, in fairness to myself, to recount the whole affair," Dene said.

The President's face darkened as he listened. Eugène's story had been a different one. He was by no means blinded as to his son's character, and he knew quite well which was the true version.

"I have told you this," Dene wound up, "because I want you to have confidence in me. It is true that Sagasta was my friend, but he is perfectly aware that I have no sympathy with his present position. I should not help him in any way, or shelter him."

The President looked thoughtfully at Dene for several moments. He was surely an honest man this!

"We have arrived," the President said, still watching Dene's face, "at the principal object of my visit to you. So far as you are concerned, understand that I do not doubt you. But, none the less, I fear that Sagasta has secret friends amongst your people."

"Have you any reason for saying this?" Dene asked.

"I have proof," the President answered. "Only two days ago one of his followers came back to San Martina and voluntarily surrendered himself. From him we learned that Sagasta and his friends were subsisting upon supplies obtained secretly from Beau Desir."

"Impossible," Dene exclaimed.

"Further," the President continued, "Sagasta is on the point of obtaining a supply of rifles and ammunition from the same source."

"I cannot believe this," Dene declared firmly. "There are no traitors here, I am sure. What you say distresses me very much, President, but I am certain that you must have been misinformed."

"So far as you are concerned, Senor Dene," the President said, "will you allow me to say that I do not in the slightest degree mistrust you, although I am bound to place a certain amount of credence in my information. I hope that you will not misunderstand the nature of my visit to you. I have not come as a spy."

"Such a thought," Dene exclaimed hastily, "never for a moment occurred to me. I look upon your visit as a great honour, and an extreme pleasure."

The President nodded his head gravely, and pinched a fresh cigar which he had taken from the box by his side.

"At the same time," he continued, "you and I must lay our heads together. My information is such, that I cannot possibly ignore it. To-morrow we must make strict investigation. My son, who is following me here, will have arrived by then, and I believe he has some suspicions as to the guilty person. For the present, let us say no more. So far as I am concerned, this visit is for me a holiday, and the first I have had for years. For many reasons I am glad that I have come. There are affairs, Senor Dene, connected with the administration of my government, in which your sympathy and aid would be of great assistance to me. I will not allude to them now. I will only say that I am happy to believe that this visit may lead to a better understanding between us. For my part, I am able to appreciate in some measure for the first time the real advantage of a more retired life such as you have chosen. I feel, I must admit, more in sympathy with you, Dene, than I have hitherto been."

"I am very glad," Dene said absently. His thoughts

had wandered, and a sense of coming trouble was strong upon him.

There was a short silence. Lucia's hand was hanging once more in its old position. Dene had an uneasy consciousness, which was still not without some sensations of pleasure, that she was expecting him to repeat that half involuntary caress of a moment before. He looked towards her, and pointed to the mountains.

"Do you see how the moonlight is travelling down the hillside?" he said. "In a few minutes it will be as light as day."

"It is very beautiful," Lucia answered, "and the quiet is delightful."

Almost as she spoke, the stillness was broken by a discordant sound. The sharp report of a pistol, followed immediately by another, rang out from a spur of the hills about a mile above them. They all three looked at one another. Dene rose to his feet.

"I must go and see what that means," he said gravely. "We do not allow firearms here."

The President followed his example.

"If you will allow me," he said, "I should like to accompany you."

CHAPTER XXXV

THE SALVATION OF RIMAREZ

IT is my son," the President cried bitterly, "and he is dead."

They were all gathered round the prostrate form which they had found underneath the deep shadow of the pine trees. Dene looked with grave pity at the man by his side. The President's head was bent, and he stood for a moment motionless. Rimarez was not pleasant to look upon. He was lying upon his back, and his face was like the face of a man who had died in mortal fear. There was no wound of any sort upon him, save a small hole just above his heart where the bullet had entered, nor were there any signs of disturbance on the cone-strewn sandy turf on which he lay. A slight smell of gunpowder still lingered upon the air. Deeper in the woods a bird was singing.

They made a litter and carried him down to the settlement, into Dene's room. Once or twice the men who carried it paused and whispered to Dene. He shook his head incredulously. Yet before long even he was puzzled. They laid him upon a couch and summoned a long, lanky

Scotchman who, on the strength of a year at St. Bartholomew's, was usually called the Doctor. Lucia was with them, pale, but quite calm.

The young man of medicine looked up perplexed after a few moments' brief examination.

"There is no blood," he whispered, "and the mon is alive. Yet the bullet has gone through the coat just over the heart. Give me a knife, Mr. Dene."

Some one handed him a clasp-knife, and he deftly cut through the coat and waistcoat. Then he thrust his hand in, and a gleam of excitement lit up his pale spectacled face. He felt about for a moment, and then suddenly withdrawing his hand, held up a little round ball in triumph.

"Eh," he cried, in excitement, "this is a clever mon this, and used to the ways of a bloodthirsty country. There's a solid sheet of zinc over his heart. He's no wounded even."

There was a cry of joy from Lucia, and an exclamation of wonder from all the rest. Dene's nerves relaxed. He drew a long breath, and the blood began once more to run freely through his veins. The President turned towards the Doctor.

"Do you mean to say that he is not wounded?"

"He is absolutely unhurt, sir," the young Scotchman answered. "Here is the bullet. I have just picked it out from the sheet of zinc under his shirt. A grand idea, mon, for these troublesome countries."

"Has he fainted then?" Dene asked.

"He is in a state of collapse from the fright. He will come to presently," the Scotchman answered. "I darena'

give him any brandy, for, to tell the truth, I should judge him to have been over-indulgent with the stimulants."

"I should like to observe," the President said, "that it is his mother to whom Eugène owes his escape. I must confess, although I am not proud of it, that I myself am in the habit of wearing a somewhat similar apparatus. The Senora procured the zinc herself, made the holes in the corners with her scissors and attached tapes to them. She has evidently equipped Eugène in the same way. Doctor, we will leave my son in your hands for the present. Senor Dene, I should like a word with you."

Dene followed him into another room.

"You picked up something near my son's body in the plantation, Senor Dene. I should like to see it."

Dene clenched his teeth and cursed himself for a fool. Nevertheless, he had no alternative. He thrust his hand into his pocket and produced a small ivory-handled pistol.

"This is the only clue I could find," he said. "I have given orders that the roll shall be called at once. Any one whose whereabouts during the last hour cannot be positively vouched for, shall be examined separately."

The President nodded, and continued to turn the pistol over in his hand, examining it curiously.

"This is more like a toy," he remarked. "It is a strange weapon for an assassin."

Lucia came gliding softly into the room. She leant for a moment over the pistol and examined it carefully.

"Whosever it may be," she said in a low, intense tone, "I hope they will be found and shot."

Dene shuddered a little. He looked at her gravely. Lucia continued half apologetically.

"It was so happy and peaceful here," she said. "We were all enjoying it so much and it seemed so different from San Martina. Oh, it was a vile thing to attempt. Fancy any one crouching down there in the thicket, waiting and waiting until they felt sure of their aim, and then deliberately killing a man who was not prepared—one who had no thoughts of fighting. There is something so cowardly about it. When one pictures it, and that miserable creature slinking off into the darkness, I feel that I would gladly stand by and see him hanged."

Again Dene shuddered. Yet he too was in sympathy with her. The hideousness of the thing was like a nightmare before his eyes.

"It was terrible," he said; "but I feel that I can never be sufficiently grateful to the Senora, your mother. It is she who has spared us from what would have been a terrible tragedy."

The President lit a cigar with fingers that were perfectly steady. Dene wondered from whence came his son's cowardice and flabby nerves.

"I am quite sure, Senor Dene," the President said, "that you are not wilfully harbouring any rebels. Yet I imagine that this circumstance may have satisfied you that you have some dangerous neighbours. You will understand, I am sure, that out of no lack of respect to you, but for all our sakes, I shall be compelled to take this matter into my own hands."

"I cannot complain," Dene said, "at anything you may choose to do."

"Sagasta," the President continued, "is the man on

whom I want to lay my hand. Sagasta, beyond the shadow of a doubt, was the instigator of that attempted murder if he was not the man who actually fired the shot. Sagasta has one or more accomplices amongst your people. To-morrow I shall endeavour to discover them. Through them I may reach Sagasta."

Dene was walking restlessly up and down the room. Outside was the murmur of many tongues. Every door was open; every person in the settlement seemed crowded together there. Only Ternissa's house was dark and silent. Lucia glided up to his side.

"You know who it was," she whispered. "I can see it in your face!"

He opened his lips to deny it, but her hand fell softly upon his arm.

"Let there be nothing but truth between you and me at least," she pleaded, with her soft brilliant eyes raised to his. "Listen. If it was he, he is a traitor and an ingrate. Will you let him know something from me?"

"I am not in communication with him," Dene said. "I know nothing of him."

"Not this minute—not now," she whispered, "but who can tell? He is not far away. When you see him tell him this. I set him free because I hated bloodshed, because I believed in him, because he taught me to think—for no other reason. If it was he or one of his creatures who fired that cowardly shot, then I wish that I had died before I had reached out my hand to help him."

"You set him free," Dene answered, "for no other reason than that?"

Her fingers seemed woven around his arm. Her voice was soft and thrilling. To Dene it was like a little throb of sweet, passionate music.

"For no other reason," she murmured. "Only because I pitied him. You know it. You know it very well. Is it not so?"

Her face was close to his, the perfume of her hair was very faint and delicate. He made a half movement towards her. He was never quite sure how it happened, but with a little murmur of content she was in his arms.

CHAPTER XXXVI

TERNISSA IN PERIL

WITH the first breath of dawn Dene, who had spent a sleepless night, dressed softly, and stole outside. He had given up his room to Eugène Ramirez, and had slept in a smaller chamber at the back of the house. Consequently, what he saw when he descended the verandah steps came as a surprise to him. A cordon of the President's bodyguard surrounded Ternissa's cottage, and a sentry stood at her door.

Dene, after a moment's hesitation, crossed the Place as though to enter the cottage. The nearest soldier saluted, but barred the way.

"What is the meaning of this?" Dene asked. "By whose orders are you here?"

"The President's, Senor," was the reply. "I am unable to let you pass."

"I am the master of the place—Mr. Dene."

The man was quite unmoved.

"Our orders are positive, Senor, and include even you. No one may enter or pass from this cottage without the special permission of the President."

"When did you get your instructions?" Dene asked, with sinking heart.

"Last night, Senor. It was soon after the attempted assassination of Captain Rimarez."

Dene turned away to find himself face to face with Angus and Dom Pedro. They drew him a little on one side.

"This is a verra serious business yonder, Mr. Dene," the former said. "I'm afraid there's trouble about for that young lassie. She was trying to escape last night, I'm told, and they politely sent her in again. Are you thinking, Mr. Dene, that it was she who fired that wicked shot?"

"I can't," Dene said hoarsely. "God knows I can't think that of her. Yet it's a terrible position."

"What will the President do, do you think?" Angus asked, "if there should be evidence against her?"

"He will have her shot," Dom Pedro said fiercely, "if we are cowards enough to stand by and allow it."

"Nonsense," Dene said firmly. "The President is incapable of such a thing."

"The question is," Dom Pedro said, "what steps are we going to take if he should attempt this? Let us be prepared."

Dene looked at him curiously.

"You are very interested, Dom Pedro. I thought that she was a stranger to you."

A curious smile hovered for a minute upon Dom Pedro's lips.

"She is a woman," he said. "That is enough. I know the cruelty of this gang of cut-throats who call themselves

the Government of San Martina. They have no respect for age or sex, guilt or innocence. I speak of what I know. Unless we play the part of men now that woman's life is lost—maybe there will be worse things happen to her. Mr. Dene, Beau Desir is yours, bought and paid for, and those soldiers are trespassing upon your property. Let us have a single word from you, and they shall go. Pietro and Stewart and half a dozen of us will see to it."

Dene shook his head.

"For the present," he said, "I will not have them interfered with. If the President knows as much as I fear he knows, he has not stationed them there without a reason. Beau Desir is mine, it is true, but with possession comes responsibility, and it is very certain that a murder was attempted here last night. We must remember that, and be prepared to deal with the matter calmly. The President has the right to protect himself, and to do him justice, I have not heard him utter anything of a vindictive nature. For the present let everything go on as usual. Let no one take any notice of the soldiers. Angus, I will ride with you as far as the Watercourse hill."

For an hour or more Dene worked at his ordinary morning routine of overseeing without even a glance at the guarded cottage. At the time which he had appointed he rode homewards, and found his guests awaiting him.

Lucia met him on the verandah. She was wearing an English white serge dress, and the soft wind from the mountains went rustling through her hair. The manner of her greeting him was significant. There was a new colour in her cheeks, and an added brightness in her eyes.

"At least," she cried gaily, "you might have asked me to ride with you this morning."

"I have been up," he continued, smiling, "since four o'clock."

"The sun woke me at five, and I have been up on the hill watching you all at work," she said. "This place is more beautiful even in the morning than at night. If it were not for my father, Mr. Dene, you would find me a very troublesome guest to be got rid of."

She was looking him full in the face with laughing eyes, and Dene knew that something gallant was expected of him in the shape of an answer. But at that moment he caught sight of a white face at the window of that guarded house, and his heart sank. He felt like a traitor to have forgotten her plight for a moment.

"How is your brother?" he asked lamely.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"If he were not my brother?" she answered, "I should say that he was suffering from the effects of being frightened almost to death. Your very droll Scotch physician uses long words and prescribes rest."

"And the President?"

She looked over her shoulder into the room.

"He will answer for himself," she said. "He has just come down, and is inquiring anxiously for breakfast. Now, please to say good-morning in the English fashion. It is what I am waiting here for."

She leaned over the verandah and held out her hand. Dene took it in his a little awkwardly. He stood bare-headed, looking up at her. She was marvellously fresh and

sweet in the clear sunlight, her lips parted, her eyes full of laughter. His own gravity melted for a moment away. She was irresistible.

"You are early abroad, *Senor Dene*," said a voice from behind her shoulder.

They both started round. *Dene* had been a little uncertain what to do with the soft white hand which had lain so unresistingly in his, but at the sound of his guest's voice he dropped it at once. The President was standing immediately behind his daughter, a good-humoured smile upon his lips and a gleam of satisfaction in his dark eyes. They had been standing hand in hand, these foolish young people. It was well. His arrival had been most opportune.

"We commence work in *Beau Desir* at sunrise, President," *Dene* answered. "And that reminds me," he continued, "the school-bell should be ringing in a few minutes, and our schoolmistress is a prisoner. Is there not some mistake?"

The President came out on to the verandah and gazed curiously across at the little cottage in front of which his sentry was posted.

"So your schoolmistress lives there, does she?" he remarked.

Dene nodded.

"Yes. She is a new arrival, and almost a stranger in the country."

"Does she live alone?"

"Certainly," *Dene* answered.

"And her name is?"

"*Ternissa Denison*."

The President looked thoughtfully across at the cottage.

"Well," he said, "I will take the liberty of paying her a visit after breakfast. In the meantime things had better, perhaps, remain as they are."

Dene bit his lip. It was not what he desired.

"Would there be any objection," he asked, "to my telling her the reason of this—patrol at her door? She must be very much mystified."

The President laid his hand upon Dene's shoulder.

"We will let things remain as they are," he said, "until after breakfast. Then I will have a little talk with you, and we will see. As for the young lady—well, she is probably not so much surprised as you imagine. Your coffee, Senor Dene, has even a more delightful odour than your English flowers."

Dene had no alternative but to accept the hint. He led the way into his morning room, where breakfast was prepared. Lucia took her seat at the head of the table with a little laugh.

"All my life," she said, "I have longed to see a real English breakfast table. Do you know, Senor Dene, I have actually wasted upon you much sympathy which was needless. I pictured you out here 'roughing it,' as you English say. How amusing. Why, you are a positive sybarite."

"In a very small way then," Dene answered, smiling. "Come, I will be frank with you. My breakfast, when I am alone, consists of porridge and bacon. The present condition of things is unusual, and I am afraid even Brown could not keep it up for long."

"But your etceteras," Lucia said. "Fruit and flowers, silver and Dresden china, cut glass and white linen. Oh, yours is a wonderful bachelor's abode. Beau Desir is not what I thought it was, I can assure you."

"It is nevertheless," the President said drily, helping himself to omelette, "a very charming place."

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE PRESIDENT'S SUSPICION

"AND now," Dene said, with the air of a man who at all hazards approaches a perilous subject, "about my schoolmistress."

The President lit his cigar, and looked thoughtfully across at the guarded cottage. He smoked for a few seconds in silence. Then he waved away the little cloud of white smoke which hung before him almost motionless in the breathless air, and turned to his host.

"I am afraid, Senor Dene," he said, "that the young lady is not all that she appears to you to be."

"In what respect?"

"May I ask you first, Senor Dene, how long you have known her?"

"We came out on the same boat from England," Dene answered.

"Exactly. You knew nothing of her previously? Now, without any wish to disparage my own possessions, at the risk however, Senor Dene, of being considered by you unpatriotic, I will ask you what possible attractions San Martina could offer to a young and, I believe, a beautiful Englishwoman?"

Dene was silent. The conversation was drifting into awkward channels.

"None, you will agree with me," the President continued drily. "However, the young lady has, I find, connections in this part of the world. My son Eugène, it appears, knew her in England. He was introduced to her by—Arnold Sagasta."

Still Dene was silent. He dared not say a word.

"You will see," the President added, "that my information is good. But it goes further. I understand that the young lady is my daughter-in-law."

"You know that?" Dene exclaimed.

"From my son himself. Further, I know that she accuses him of having gained her consent to their marriage by a trick, that she has never lived with him, that she is passionately anxious to free herself from him. Now, Senor Dene, you will understand why I look with a certain amount of suspicion upon this young lady. You will, I think, admit I am not altogether unreasonable."

"I am quite sure," Dene said warmly, "that it was not she who attempted your son's life."

The President shrugged his shoulders.

"You know her," he remarked, "and I do not. Only, if it were not she, it was Sagasta."

"Ternissa Denison at least is incapable of anything of the sort," Dene declared. "I will go and speak to her. If she knows anything of the matter she will tell us."

The President rose to his feet.

"She shall tell us together," he said. "If she is innocent and speaks the truth she has nothing to fear. It is justice

I require, not vengeance. Come, my friend, we will speak to her together."

They crossed the Place. At the gate of her little house Dene paused.

"Allow me," he said, "to go in and announce your visit to her. If you will take this chair upon the piazza I will bring her out to you."

But the President retained his friendly clasp of Dene's hand.

"Pardon me, Senor," he said, "but I too will enter. We will pay our respects to the young lady with the Madonna face together."

Dene still hesitated, but his companion, although he spoke lightly, was evidently in earnest. There was no escaping from his insistence. Whilst they stood there the door opened, and Ternissa herself appeared. She was pale, but quite composed and at her ease. She returned the President's bow gravely, and smiled at Dene.

"The President," Dene said, "wishes to explain to you personally why he has thought it necessary to place your cottage under—surveillance."

"Will you come inside?" she asked, "or shall we sit upon the piazza? It is cooler out here, and I can send for some chairs."

The President waved his hand.

"Do not trouble, my dear young lady," he begged. "I have weak eyes, and the glare of the sun distresses me. May we not be privileged to enter for a few minutes your little sitting-room?"

"By all means," she answered cheerfully, "if you really prefer it."

Dene's warning glance was disregarded. She ushered them without hesitation into the little sitting-room, which, by some occult and feminine means, she had contrived to furnish from the slenderest of resources in a very dainty and original manner. Dene's eyes swept the wall, and his heart stood still. It was true then. He had been deceived by no chance resemblance. He cursed himself silently that he had not had the wit to somehow avoid this most untoward visit. Then with an effort he pulled himself together. There was yet a chance. The President was solely occupied in looking at Ternissa. He had not, during those first few seconds, glanced round the room. Dene, as though affected by the heat, moved towards the window, and stood there with one hand resting upon a small table, silent and nervous.

"My visit," the President said, addressing Ternissa, "is not altogether a pleasant one. You will doubtless have gathered as much from the fact that I have considered it necessary to have your house guarded."

"I have been waiting," she said coolly, "for some explanation."

"The explanation is simple," the President continued. "Last night, within a quarter of a mile from here—on that hill in fact, at the back of your cottage—my son was fired at, and only escaped death by a miracle."

"I heard the report," she said. "What has that to do with me?"

The President stroked his grey imperial. His keen eyes seemed fastened upon her face.

"So far," he said, "the question of motive alone has

weighed with me. You are the only person in Beau Desir, so far as I know, to whom my son's death would be welcome."

"What do you mean?" she cried.

"You are, I understand," the President continued, "his wife."

She was clearly staggered.

"Did he tell you so?"

"Yes," the President admitted. "He told me also that there were differences between you. One of the objects of my visit here was to make your acquaintance. Eugène is not altogether, perhaps, a satisfactory son, but both his mother and myself were impressed by the wonderful earnestness with which he spoke of you. I decided to come to Beau Desir and see whether I could not effect something in the nature of a reconciliation."

"It is useless," she murmured. "I was most cruelly deceived."

"Nothing," the President said sternly, "could justify you in seeking to obtain your freedom by assassination."

A look of horror passed across her face.

"You do not believe," she cried, "that it was I who fired the shot?"

"It is possible," the President continued, changing his position somewhat, but keeping his eyes steadfastly fixed upon Ternissa's face, "that you did not actually fire it yourself. I am glad to be able to think so. But it is almost impossible that you should not know who did fire it. No, do not answer me for a moment. Let me tell you this. I have wonderful eyesight. I saw you sitting in the dark

corner of your piazza for half an hour before. You imagined yourself unseen; you were, I believe, unseen except by me. You were—forgive me—a somewhat interesting person to see in a settlement such as Beau Desir. Besides, I felt sure from the first that you were the woman whom I had come to see. I watched you with so much interest that my eyes became accustomed to the gloom. I could see the outline of your face. I could watch your movements. Presently I saw you start and look round. Then you rose hurriedly. Some one had come into the room behind—some one whose presence you seemed to find disturbing. You disappeared—a few minutes before the shot was fired. I caught the fluttering of your gown upon the hillside at the back of your cottage. I heard some stones fall as though some one were clambering up."

The President's short, stumpy fingers were engaged in twirling his grey moustache, his whole attention seemed absorbed in watching the woman who stood before him. Dene's hand was silently stretched out. It reached now across the little table to the wall. Suddenly the President looked towards him. Dene was hot and cold by turns. There was suspicion in the President's face, but Dene's fingers were already covering the object he desired. The President looked back to Ternissa, and Dene drew a long sigh of relief.

"Young lady," he said quietly, "I am waiting to see if you have anything to say to me. I have told you what I saw, I have told you what I know; I might add that the pistol from which the shot was fired was evidently a woman's. Sagasta, my son's enemy, is lurking in these

parts, and I am told that he is the man for whose sake you came out to this country. Now, have you anything to say to me? Can you give me any reason why I should not order your immediate arrest?"

"Except that I am innocent," she answered, "nothing."

"You have no explanation to offer?"

"None."

The President's face darkened. He walked to the window as though about to summon one of the soldiers from outside. Dene laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"Give her a little time," he pleaded hoarsely. "Remember that she is your son's wife."

The President came back into the room. He addressed Ternissa.

"Senor Dene," he said, "has suggested that a little reflection may induce you to be more open with us. We will leave you for a time. But I must ask you, Senorita, to remember this. I am a father, and my son's happiness is much to his mother and myself. I do not believe that you fired that shot. Tell us who did, show us how to secure him, and I pledge you my word that the Senora Rimarez and myself will gladly receive you as our daughter, and we will do our best to make you both happy. Eugène has faults, but he is a good fellow at heart, and I believe that he would make you an excellent husband."

He paused. Ternissa made no answer. The President continued, and his voice grew sterner.

"On the other hand, Senorita, forgive me if I remind you also that I am a soldier as well as President of San Martina, and, as a matter of duty, if you remain obstinate I shall

be compelled to pass upon you the only sentence which cowards and assassins and their accomplices deserve. I regret your sex, but I respect the law."

The two men passed out into the hot sunshine together, leaving Ternissa alone, dumb and white. The President lit a cigarette, and looked curiously into Dene's grave face.

"I very much regret this occurrence, my dear Senor Dene," he said. "I trust you will understand that I am actuated by no vindictive spirit. At least I think that we need not trouble to make any inquiries now as to who is Sagasta's secret friend amongst your people."

Lucia leaned over the balcony, half laughing, half pouting.

"You are detestable," she cried. "For more than an hour I have been waiting for you, Senor Dene. I want you to show me everything."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE SECRET PATH

"TERNISSA."

"Is that you?"

She came softly out from the deep shadows of the piazza, out into the black velvety darkness, so intense that even when they stood side by side she laid her hand tremblingly upon his arm to assure herself of his presence.

"Is that really you?" she repeated.

"Yes."

He said no more for the moment. She tried to look into his face, but even as her eyes grew accustomed to the darkness she could only see its outline. Yet his silence somehow chilled her.

"Come inside where I can see you," she said abruptly.

He shook his head.

"I suffered enough in there this morning," he said. "Let us go to the Watercourse hill. There will be no one there to overhear us."

She peered through the darkness into his face, more than ever anxious to read his expression. To the Watercourse hill. Was it by chance that he had mentioned that

place? She could only judge of his attitude towards her from his tone, and that was very grave indeed.

"I did not know," she said, "that I was permitted to go outside. There is a soldier at the gate still."

"I have given my word that you shall not leave the place," Dene answered. "He will not interfere with us."

They walked slowly up the rough path, passing in and out amongst the pine trees, until they reached the ledge overlooking the great hollow, where a long since dried-up river had once come out of the mountain's bosom. They stood for a moment drinking in the cooler air. Ternissa leaned back against a young pine tree. Dene stood by her side, trying to look into her white face.

"You are very solemn," she said.

"Do you not think," he answered, "that I have cause to be?"

Then to his surprise she laughed softly, and he caught a gleam from her eyes flashing at him through the darkness.

"It is I, surely," she declared, "who should be serious. For am I not a prisoner, with brave soldiers of the republic to guard my doors? And yet I am not afraid—not one little bit."

Suddenly she felt the firm grasp of his hands upon her shoulders. Her face was drawn close to his. She knew quite well beforehand what this thing was which he was preparing to ask her.

"What had you to do with that shot?"

"Nothing. Less than nothing. If I could I would have prevented it."

The grasp of his hands became like the pressure of iron

bands upon her shoulders, and she nearly cried out with the pain. His eyes had mastered the darkness now, and he asked her his question again.

"You had nothing whatever to do with it?"

"Nothing."

Then he let her go and a long-drawn sigh of relief went up from his heart.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed.

His whole expression had changed. He seemed for a moment too overcome for speech. Then she knew that he had believed this thing of her.

"You condemned me unheard," she murmured.

"Do not be angry with me," he answered. "I had what seemed to me to be proof. Look."

He thrust his hand into his pocket and drew out a shining pistol.

"Do you know this?" he asked.

She recognised it at once.

"It is mine," she answered. "It is one of a pair I keep in my sitting-room."

"Do you know where the other one is?" he asked.

She looked at him perplexed.

"I have not missed either of them," she said.

"One," Dene said, "was picked up last night a few feet from where Eugène Rimarez was lying. The President has it now. It is the clue by which he expects to trace the would-be murderer. This one I took from your table and secreted it whilst we were there together this morning."

Her hands fell to her side. She looked at him intently.

"I understand now," she exclaimed. "Of course you believed then that I had dropped it there?"

"I knew at least," he replied, "that if the President had found its fellow in your room he would have accepted it as quite sufficient proof."

He shuddered.

"It was a narrow escape."

"It was the most terrible few minutes of my life," he declared. "You are not safe yet, Ternissa. I want you to give me your whole confidence."

She looked at him and sighed.

"What is it—that you want to know?"

"First of all—you had a visitor that night?"

"Yes."

"It was he who borrowed your pistol?"

"I suppose so. I did not know that he had taken it."

"Was it one of my people? Was it any one in Beau Desir?"

She did not answer immediately. His face grew sterner.

"Ternissa," he said, "you are still in danger. Unless you will trust me, how can I help you?"

She remained silent. Over their heads the pine tree tops were rustling faintly as the night breeze grew stronger. From below came the far-away tinkling of Pietro's guitar. Suddenly the deep stillness around them—the stillness which had been all the more perceptible for those faint distant sounds—was broken. From somewhere amongst the scrubby undergrowth and single trees which overhung the watercourse came the stealthy sound of footsteps. There was the snapping of a dry twig. Dene even fancied



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“Who is there? If you do not answer I shall fire!”

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that he could hear the quick breathing of a man descending the hill rapidly.

They started a little apart. Ternissa, in moving, touched a loose stone with her foot and sent it rolling down the chasm. After that they both stood perfectly still. The footsteps also had ceased. The silence became positively breathless.

Dene, moving cautiously and on tiptoe, stepped to the edge of the chasm, and, passing his arm round a young fir sapling, leaned over the edge, looking down into the rocky bed below. It seemed to him that the footsteps had come from some one scrambling either up or down the bank on the other side, but though he listened intently, there was no sound to be heard, and the darkness was impenetrable.

"Who is there?" Dene cried.

There was no answer.

Then Dene set his teeth and felt for the handle of his revolver.

"Once more," he cried, "who is there? If you do not answer I shall fire."

Not a sound came back save the hollow echoes of his own voice. He waited for a moment. Then he stretched his hand out in the direction from which the footsteps had come, and fired. The flash of light, a long yellow line of streaming fire, lit up for a second the gloomy ravine, and Dene fancied that on the other side he could see a dark crouching figure. Then there was black darkness again, greater than before, and there came back to them no cry nor any answering fire.

"Somehow," Dene muttered, between his teeth, "I

must get to the bottom of this. Wait here for a moment, Ternissa."

He took a step forward, but Ternissa laid her hands upon his arm.

"Please do not leave me. I am frightened," she pleaded.

"There is some one down below, and I must find out who it is," he answered fiercely. "He was either spying upon us or trying to cross the mountain. I want to know whether it is one of my own people. There is something strange going on amongst us."

"The mountain is inaccessible here," she whispered, "and at the Pass you have a sentry. It was one of President Ramirez' soldiers following us. They are watching me."

"When we get back," he answered, "we shall see. Ternissa, I am going to whisper to you. I am afraid to speak out. Such darkness is intolerable. One could believe that there were listeners everywhere. Listen. I am going to whisper. Who took that pistol from your room?"

She was silent. In a moment he continued.

"Ternissa," he said, "I want to know whether it was indeed any one in Beau Desir who was your visitor, or whether it was Arnold Sagasta. You must tell me this."

Still she was silent. Only Dene, who was striving to see her face through the darkness, heard a little gasp.

"I cannot," she faltered. "I cannot tell you."

Then for the first time Dene felt his faith in her shaken. For the last week he had had a watchman posted at the

pass which led through to Sagasta's hiding-place. Each day he had reported that no one had passed within sight of him. Was there a secret way up to the mountains? or had he indeed traitors amongst his very midst?

"Tell me," he said, with a new note of irony in his tone, "have you invisible friends who visit you by night-time and fade away into thin air with the dawn? For, I tell you, Ternissa, that I know every man and woman in Beau Desir, and I do not know one who would be base and disloyal enough to stoop to murder. Now, I will know the truth."

"Very well," she cried fiercely. "You shall know all you wish to know. Just now you heard a sound. You thought you saw a figure. Well, you were right. Along the bed of that river is a hidden path up the mountains. You could never find it, but it is there. Dom Pedro showed it to Sagasta, and it was Sagasta whom you saw just now and fired at. Now will you let me go. I have told you the truth. I have imposed upon you and broken my oath to Sagasta. I would that I had died before I had ever come to this miserable country."

She covered her face with her hands, and the sound of her sobs mingled with a low moaning breeze which had just sprung up amongst the pine trees. Dene stood by her side, motionless and silent.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE BLACK FEVER

IT was long past midnight, and save for Ternissa every man and woman in Beau Desir was sleeping. The two soldiers who had been left to watch her were not only asleep, but happily and completely drunk. During the evening they had mixed with the people of Beau Desir, had danced and sung songs, had made maudlin love to the women, and had narrowly escaped several thrashings from the men. Happily it had occurred to Angus that the safest way of avoiding quarrels, and perhaps bloodshed, was to present them each with a bottle of liqueur brandy. The two soldiers had retired apart, each hugging his treasure. At first a few snatches of ribald song and an occasional shout had testified to their happiness, then the sound of a quarrel—which, however, neither of them seemed to be in a position to follow up—and finally, the inevitable stupor. Beau Desir spent the remainder of the evening in peace, and when night came Ternissa's cottage was unguarded.

There had crept up since the afternoon a change in the

unbroken magnificence of the rich Southern summer. The sky was covered with black clouds, and a wind was wailing down the valley. Outside was thick darkness—darkness almost to be felt. Ternissa sat alone in her little back room waiting.

Soon there came a slight sound outside, the faint scratching as though of some animal against the window-pane. She rose with pale face and opened the door. A dark figure passed silently inside. It was Sagasta.

Almost without speech he threw aside his cloak and sat down at the table. She went to a cupboard and brought him food. He attacked it silently and ravenously, eating with all the unrestraint of a starving man. His cheeks were white and thin, and black rims were engraven under his hollow eyes. She looked at him and shuddered. There was something wolfish in his whole appearance.

When he had eaten he stood up for a moment and listened. Then he lit a cigarette, and spoke to her in a hoarse, feverish whisper.

"News came to us last night from San Martina," he said. "Young Andrew Valjean, whose father was hung last week, has joined us. Three hundred others are on their way. They may arrive at any moment."

"Three hundred," she repeated mechanically. "The army of the republic is over a thousand."

"With three hundred men," he continued, "we can hold the mountains against as many thousands. Our men can lie behind the bushes and pick them off one by one. Oh, the joy of seeing them fall. We shall make the mountains hideous with their bodies. We shall crucify

them to trees, and hang them over the ravines. Oh, they will soon be weary of it."

She looked at him with shuddering fear; a new alarm, too, suddenly seizing her. Since she had seen him last there was a curious change in the man. A certain measure of virility seemed to have left him. The droop of his mouth, the gleam in his black eyes were almost bestial.

"You frighten me, Arnold," she said. "You are not yourself to-night."

"I shall be myself," he muttered, "when the father has gone where I have sent the son—to hell. I shall be myself when the whole brood is wiped off the face of the earth."

He did not know, then, that Eugène Rimarez was still alive. She kept silence, devoutly thankful that no word of this had escaped her. She rose and laid her hand upon his.

"Arnold," she said, "I—don't think me false, but I cannot help you any longer. I cannot live here and deceive the people who are sheltering me. Gregory Dene suspects, the President suspects me. I am threatened even now with imprisonment, and even death. I have risked a good deal for you, Arnold, for the sake of the past. I want you to leave me alone now. Oh, if you would only take my advice—leave all this wretched bloodshed, and go back to England. There is nothing to be gained by it. Believe——"

"Nothing to be gained by it," he hissed, "when a Rimarez is alive. Bah! you don't mean it. You are raving."

"I am in sober, solemn earnest," she protested.

"You care no more—for me," he cried.

"Nor you for me," she answered, looking him in the face. "There was a time when we cared for one another. It was the memory of that time which brought me out to San Martina when Eugène Rimarez wrote that your life was in danger and its price was my coming."

"You do not care any more then," he muttered. "You are free now. We could be married."

She shook her head sadly. He looked at her with a cunning gleam in his eyes.

"I know," he exclaimed. "It is Gregory Dene, the Englishman. It is he who has taken my place."

She turned away from him and made no answer. Then he caught her by the wrist.

"Listen," he said hoarsely. "We have no time for philandering. Perhaps you are right. The time when I cared for any woman seems far enough off now. What I want is revenge—and freedom for San Martina. Come, you shall help me to-night, and afterwards you can go your way and marry the Englishman or any one else."

"What do you want—to-night?" she asked fearfully.

The pressure of his fingers was like the burning of hot coals upon her wrist. He bent closer over her, and her terror increased.

"We want arms—rifles and ammunition. They are here in your schoolhouse. We want them."

"You are going to rob Gregory Dene?" she exclaimed.

"Ay, if you like to call it robbery. We are going to rob him of his rifles, and we are going to rob him of Beau Desir. Oh, it has been well planned. The fool should

have joined us. I asked him—he refused. He ordered me away. He dared me to come here. He has made himself an enemy. He has become a parasite of that devil, the President. But I have them both in the hollow of my hand. Listen. To-night Dene and his guests are away. They are sleeping on the horse-ranche—they will not return till dawn. Ten of my men are outside in a line between here and the Watercourse hole. The rifles are in the schoolhouse. We shall get them quietly and hand them out two at a time. In an hour we shall have them all. It is a dark night. The schoolhouse stands apart. They will be passed from one to the other. Then do you not see, Beau Desir will be ours when we choose. Dene and his men may go and live in San Martina if they choose, or in holes up in the mountains as they have forced us to.”

“And how,” she asked, with a sort of desperate quietness, “are you going to get into the schoolhouse silently?”

“With the keys,” he exclaimed, “which you have. It is time now. Where are they?”

“I shall not give them to you,” she said.

A spasm of fierce anger darkened his face. For a moment he was speechless with passion. His teeth chattered, and his lips twitched.

“I have lied to Gregory Dene,” she said slowly, “and I have deceived him for your sake. I will do so no more. You shall not have the keys.”

She did not doubt any longer but that he was mad or going mad. He sprang upon her with a little laugh.

“If you do not show, or tell me, where those keys are,”

he said, "I shall kill you. I mean it. I shall kill you. You can shout if you like. They sleep hard in Beau Desir, and there is no one to hear you. Give me the keys."

"Arnold," she pleaded, "think of what you are doing, what you are saying to me. We cared for one another once. Indeed, I would do anything now that was not utterly despicable to save you. But I cannot betray the man who has trusted and the people who have been kind to me. You would not hurt me, Arnold! I am only a woman, and I am defenceless."

"Give me the keys," he muttered doggedly.

"Never," she answered firmly.

He raised his hand and struck her. She fell sobbing upon the little sofa, and a cry that was half a moan broke from her lips.

"That is to show that I am in earnest," he cried. "Now look."

He drew a long knife from a sheath in his inner pocket and held it over her.

"You see it. Now give me the keys, or I shall kill you—with this. You see. It is sharp. It will be very easy. I will kill you, and then if I do not find the keys I will set fire to the whole place. Look at me, Ternissa. It is not pleasant to die. Oh, I have been near it, and I know. For the last time—give me the keys."

There was only a little moan from her lips. She was praying for unconsciousness, but she had no power to close her eyes. She saw the knife raised higher and higher, and—then—her ears were quicker than his—she heard the

latch of her front door lifted and her name called in a weak voice.

She gave a hysterical little cry. The knife was poised quivering in the air. Then the door between the two rooms was suddenly pushed open, and a white ghastly figure stood for a moment upon the threshold. He glanced from the crouching woman to the man, then with a cry of rage he flung himself unarmed upon Sagasta.

The two men rolled over on the floor, but there was no contest. Eugène Ramirez' fingers were fastened upon Sagasta's throat, and Sagasta made no effort to escape. The whole place was awakened by his hideous cries. Even after they had torn the two men apart, and Sagasta with his limbs securely bound lay grovelling in a corner, he kept pointing at Eugène Ramirez and muttering to himself.

"What use to kill a Ramirez," he moaned, "when they come back from hell?"

CHAPTER XL

A WONDERFUL VISIT

FOUR and twenty hours later the President, with Lucia by his side, stood upon the piazza of Dene's house, waiting only for their horses to begin the return journey to San Martina. Pietro was playing his guitar out in the Square, and most of the dwellers in Beau Desir were about, eager to catch a parting glimpse of the President and his beautiful daughter.

"It is the end of a very pleasant holiday," the President remarked, drawing on his gloves. "You have enjoyed it, Lucia?"

"More than any other holiday in my life," she answered truthfully.

"He is hospitable, is he not—this Englishman?" her father remarked, watching her covertly.

"They say that his countrymen always are," she answered, gathering her skirts into her hand. "It is what they call a national characteristic."

"Gregory Dene is a very fine man," the President said. "There is no one whom I have ever met who has attracted me more, or in whom I would place more implicit con-

fidence. He is honest and brave and rich. In his country I believe that he is noble. You have—nothing to tell me, Lucia?"

She turned away from him with a hot blush upon her cheeks.

"Nothing, father "

The President signed.

"Well, there is no harm at least in saying that nothing in this world would make your mother and me more happy."

She looked at him with large, frightened eyes.

"You will not—you must not say anything to him. It is not the custom with English people. If you did I would go away. I would never see him again."

Her father smiled at her gently.

"Never fear, little one. If he does not know a jewel when he sees it, his must be the loss. And indeed I am not sure whether it would be for the best. We have talked, your mother and I, of leaving this country some time, of making an effort to end our days in Europe. If so, life would be very different for you. You would meet those who are your equals, and Gregory Dene would soon be forgotten."

The girl looked up at the dark line of hills with a very soft light in her eyes and a little sob catching in her throat. There was nothing at all attractive to her in the thought of Europe. Just then it seemed to her that there was no place in the world where happiness was possible save at Beau Desir. For a moment she was sad. Then the music of Pietro's guitar came floating to her out of the darkness

and a smile parted her lips. She remembered—ah, well, she would always have that to remember.

Soon Dene came out to them. Their horses were brought round, and amidst a little chorus of farewell cheers, they rode off. It was full moon in a few hours, and they had decided to make their journey by night and so avoid the great heat of the midday sun. Dene was to ride with them as far as the Pass, and very soon, in obedience to a gesture from her father, Lucia fell a little behind.

"We have enjoyed our visit to you, Senor Dene," he said, "extremely. I beg to thank you most heartily for your hospitality."

"It has been a pleasure to have you and your daughter," Dene declared heartily. "I only hope that I shall have the opportunity of welcoming you here many more times."

The President bowed.

"The events of last night," he continued, "were some what tragical, it is true, but on the whole I cannot regret them."

"Poor Sagasta," Dene murmured.

"He is to be heartily pitied," the President said, "and in his present state he is of course safe from those measures which I should most certainly have otherwise taken against him. Your opinion, I believe, is the same as mine."

"He is hopelessly insane," Dene answered sorrowfully. "There does not seem to me to be the slightest hope for him."

The President nodded gravely.

"I am bound to admit," he said, "that Eugène's plucky rescue of the lady whom he would certainly have murdered

has been a source of delight to me. My son has disappointed me in many ways. To find him capable of an act of real heroism has been one of the pleasantest surprises of my life."

"I believe," Dene said, "that it will make a different man of him. There was no doubt as to the heroism. He threw himself upon Sagasta in his weak state absolutely unarmed. It was a splendid act, and it has won for him what I believe nothing else in the world would have done."

"Are you sure that she will keep her word?"

"I am absolutely sure," Dene answered firmly. "Ternissa is a woman who knows her own mind. She has looked at him with different eyes ever since that moment. I left them sitting together like an old married couple. You will find that they will be very happy together. As soon as he is strong enough she has promised to come to San Martina with him."

The President glanced over his shoulder to where the lights of Beau Desir lay twinkling in the valley.

"Well," he said, "these have been eventful days. My most dangerous enemy is disposed of and my son is a changed man. I shall begin to think, Senor Dene, that you are one of those who carry with them the amulet of good fortune."

"I shall be only too glad," Dene said, "if the removal of Sagasta means the pacification of San Martina. To tell you the truth, the appearance of the place last time I was there thoroughly alarmed me."

"It will mean," the President said, "the gradual calming down of all the elements, which, as you say, alarmed you."

In a few years I trust that San Martina will be an altered place. There are many ways, Senor Dene, in which I myself have perhaps failed as the head of a very turbulent people. But they will be amended. Yes, I think that they will be amended."

They rode on for a few minutes in silence. Dene spurred his horse and rode for awhile by Lucia's side.

"You must look round," he said, "to see the last of Beau Desir. May I hope that it will not be long before you come again."

She turned in her saddle and looked downwards to where Beau Desir seemed but a little cluster of farm-buildings and the great fields but pathwork at their feet. She looked long and earnestly. The country was very fair in the full flood of moonlight which was going stronger every moment.

"Farewell, Beau Desir," she murmured softly. "You named your valley well, Senor Dene. It is a very happy and a very beautiful little corner of the earth."

"You may say all the nice things in the world about it," he said gently, "but not farewell. I am hoping that you may see Beau Desir again before many months have passed."

"I do not think so," she answered gravely. "To-night I feel that I shall never see it again."

Dene opened his lips to speak, but the President rode up to them.

"You will not forget, Senor Dene, our fête next week. We are relying upon your presence, and you will stay, of course, at the Presidency?"

"I will come," Dene answered, "with all the pleasure in the world"

He reined in his horse, for they had reached the Pass, and before them now stretched the plain which rolled up to the gates of San Martina. Suddenly the President paused in the act of framing a farewell sentence. Below them in the pine-wood a night bird had commenced to sing. Soft and sweet and pure, every note as it reached them through the moonlit silence seemed quivering with melody. But Lucia, after those first few moments of delight, turned away with a vague look of trouble in her face.

"You know what the natives say," she murmured. "It is the song of death."

But Dene took her hand and laughed cheerfully.

"Never believe it," he cried. "Never believe that anything so beautiful could be of ill omen. My children at Beau Desir tell me that the night bird sings only to God, and that is why it sings at night when there is no one else to listen."

"It is a pretty fancy," she murmured.

Another glad little burst of song reached them. Dene wheeled round his horse and waved his hand.

"Never believe your natives," he cried. "That little bird is singing of life and of love and of hope. There is nothing of death in that song."

And Lucia rode homewards with a faint smile upon her lips and the song of the bird still in her ears.

CHAPTER XLI

SAN MARTINA *EN FÊTE*

IT was a very different San Martina into which Dene rode late in the afternoon of the day of the President's fancy-dress ball. The whole place seemed to be *en fête*. The shops were closed, not this time for fear of stray bullets, but in order that everybody should have time to prepare for the evening. It was a general holiday. The saloons were full, the streets for the most part were empty. The usual array of flags generally visible on holidays, saints' days, and revolutions were in evidence. Dene rode through the heart of the place with a smile upon his lips. After all, it was hard to take life seriously here. Through the opened windows of the houses he could hear light feminine voices and gay laughter. Once or twice a handkerchief was waved at him, a pair of black eyes flashed invitingly from an oval Spanish face and a little challenge in broken English was thrown out to him.

"Au revoir, Senor—until this evening!"

And Dene waved his hand and laughed back in response, accepting all the challenges and making numberless vague appointments. Everywhere was the same gaiety. The

men and the women were all filled with the spirit of it. Dene thought of Sagasta and his ravings with a grim smile. There were no signs of his three hundred malcontents. How utterly out of place, after all, that white-faced, anxious enthusiast had been amongst so mercurial and pleasure-loving a nation. He rode on past the high wall which bordered the President's garden, rode in the shadow of the flowering shrubs which drooped over and brushed against his cheek. From the other side came every now and then a waft of faint fragrance; the soft sunny air seemed laden with the perfume of roses and orange blossom. As he neared the house he rose in his stirrups and gazed towards the wide piazza. There were many people there spreading out an awning, but the gleam of a white dress for which he looked was nowhere to be seen.

He dismounted in front of the broad steps of the house, and his horse and the mule which had followed with his baggage were led away to the stables. Inside the building everything was in confusion. The great square hall, hung with banners and flags, was being fitted with numberless small round tables, and beyond, the dining-room had been treated in the same way. Magnificent palms and ferns from the conservatory lined the walls, the window-sashes had been removed, and the whole place was delightfully cool. There was no one to meet him or any one who seemed to regard his presence, so Dene strolled about until he came to the great ball-room. Here a small army of men were at work strengthening and enlarging the bandstand; the floor shone like polished glass, and the whole of

one side of the room had been bodily removed, so that one walked straight out into the beautiful gardens, where there was a vista of green trees and brilliant beds of flowers, and here and there more small tables. In the midst of it all was Lucia.

She was standing with her hands behind her, giving weary instructions to one of the workmen, and some shadow of the old discontent lay upon her pale face. But when she saw Dene the cloud for a moment was lifted. Her eyes softened, the half-scornful curve of her lips was gone. She came towards him with outstretched hands and a delicate colour in her cheeks—as delicate and as fresh, Dene thought, as the cluster of pink roses in her waist-band.

"You have come then," she exclaimed, with what sounded like a sigh of relief. "I am so glad!"

"My coming was not a matter of uncertainty, was it?" he asked, smiling and taking her hands in his. "I promised."

"Ah, but I did not know," she answered, with a little sigh. "I thought that you would probably disapprove so much of the whole thing, that when you reflected you would decide to stay away."

"And why should I disapprove?" he inquired, smiling.

"It seems such a shameful waste of money when every one is so poor. Surely you must feel that?" she said.

"It is scarcely my business," he answered gravely. "I think your father is likely to know best what he is doing. He understands the people whom he has to govern. It is

possible that many of them would rather have one such night as this than anything which you or I could suggest for their benefit. Then, after all, the money which is being spent is all distributed in San Martina."

"Well, you may be right," she said. "At least what you say sounds comforting. Will you not come outside for a few minutes? It is deafening here. One cannot speak."

He followed her out into the shaded part of the garden where she had taken him on that first visit of his to the Presidency. He looked down at her, remembering it,—wondering, too, how greatly in that short space of time he had altered his opinion concerning her. He had thought of her then as she had walked by his side, unwilling and morose, as merely a petulant and a spoilt child. He had not even considered her then more than ordinarily pretty. She led the way to the little seat where they had sat before, and looked up at him with a smile.

"The green carmenita," she remarked, "still flourishes. You are very neglectful for such an enthusiast. You have not even examined the new blooms."

"The green carmenita," he answered, "fulfilled a useful purpose, and I am properly grateful to it. Beyond that, I think you know the measure of my interest in it."

"Well," she said, "I must admit that this time I brought you here for a different purpose. I have something to say to you, and I wished it to be here. I wished it to be here that I should say farewell to you."

"Farewell," he repeated wonderingly. "What do you mean?"

She drew from her pocket a letter and smoothed it out upon her knee.

"I am going away," she said softly, "in three days. I am going to the English hospital at Buenos Ayres. You will see that this is from the principal. I am to be what they call a probationer."

She was watching his face eagerly, wondering a little at—vaguely disappointed at his expression. For Dene was conscious that her news had affected him in an unexpected way. What she had planned was just what might have been expected from a girl of character and ideals. Her little rebellion against the mental and moral lassitude of the place was a very brave and a very praiseworthy thing. He felt that he should have met that eager gaze of hers with a smile of downright approval,—that he ought really to congratulate her warmly on having dared to take her life into her own hands that she might make of it a better thing. And he did none of these things. He looked at her a little blankly, then he read through the formal letter from the matron of the hospital, with a glance at the list of arduous rules enclosed, and then back again at the daintily clad beautiful girl by his side, without a single spark of enthusiasm. He appreciated at that moment more even than he had ever done the delicacy of her shapely hands and skin, the spotlessness of her white muslin gown, the general air of well-bred and self-respecting elegance so perfectly realised in the most trifling details of her toilette and person. He thought of her in the ward of

a hospital attempting work for which she was obviously unsuited, and he was conscious of a very strong antagonism to this scheme of hers.

"Have you quite made up your mind?" he asked doubtfully. "Are you sure that—that you will like it?"

A deeper colour flushed into her dusky cheeks. She drew a little away from him. Her disappointment was bravely but not altogether concealed. There was a little choking in her throat and her eyes were dim with tears.

"You—you think that I shall not persevere. That I shall give it up—that it is a whim. And I hoped that you would be pleased. I hoped that you at least would approve."

Dene was himself again in a measure, although so far as regarded her project he felt more averse to it every moment.

"Lucia," he said, "do not believe for a moment that I thought any such thing. It is a very brave and a very womanly thing that you are going to do. I can't explain for a moment what I feel—against it. Tell me, what do your people say?"

"They do not know," she answered calmly. "No, do not interrupt me, Senor Dene. You know them—they have those ideas about the bringing up of a girl which you and I know to be false. They would keep from me, if they could, every chance for development. They would dress me in pretty gowns and give me sweets to eat and novels to read until one of these detestable, hateful young men here decided that he would like to marry me, and then—oh, it is too hideous, too sickening. I have had

trouble already of this sort. More, I will not endure. I have made up my mind. I am doing what is right and honest. They would never believe it, and it is useless to attempt to convince them."

"But how can you leave without their knowledge?" Dene asked, with an uncomfortable feeling that the girl was in the right and that he had no arguments to use against her. "It is not easy for any one so well known as you to leave San Martina."

"There is a small steamer in the harbour now, sailing for Buenos Ayres to-morrow," she answered. "I am going by her; my things are already on board. My maid was leaving. The passage has been taken in her name. Only it will be I who will go."

"To-morrow," he remarked, a little dazed, "is very soon."

"The sooner the better," she declared. "I am weary to death of my life here. Do you know that those two days at Beau Desir were the only ones I have cared for since I left school."

"You—liked them?" Dene asked.

"Very much," she answered softly. "I was very happy at Beau Desir."

A soft dreamy light filled her eyes. They sat in silence for several minutes. Then Dene bent over and suddenly imprisoned one of her hands. She snatched it away and looked up at him startled and flushed. The tears were in her eyes.

"Senor Dene," she said reproachfully. "Oh——"

A little sob choked her speech. She sprang to her feet

and ran swiftly down the path. Dene started to follow her, but she was too quick for him. He caught the gleam of her white dress through the shrubbery, but when he turned the corner she had disappeared. Instead he came face to face with the President.

CHAPTER XLII

POLITICS AND LOVE

"YOU are the very man, Senor Dene," the President said, "whom I most desired to see. I heard that you had arrived and I was looking for you."

"I am," Dene said, recovering his breath, "quite at your service."

The President led the way to a more retired part of the garden. In fact they returned to the very seat on which Dene and Lucia had been sitting.

"How is Eugène?" the President asked, lifting the tails of his frock-coat and sitting down.

"He is much better," Dene answered. "In a week or two I think that he will be quite recovered. His wife is nursing him, and I really believe, President, that your son is a changed man."

"I am glad to hear it, Senor," Rimarez declared. "And Sagasta?"

"He will never give you any more trouble," Dene said gravely. "His reason is altogether gone. He is quiet and perfectly harmless."

The President was silent for a moment. Then he took a black cigar from his pocket and began to smoke.

"It is about my daughter, Lucia, that I wished to speak with you," he said at length. "I want to ask your advice on a certain matter concerning her."

"I shall be very glad to give it," Dene murmured.

"Her mother and I," the President continued, "have just made a very curious and disturbing discovery. A person from Buenos Ayres who appears to be the matron of a hospital there, has written to us, as Lucia's parents, and acquainted us with a fact which has been a severe shock to both of us. To be brief, it appears that Lucia, without our knowledge or consent, has engaged herself to go to this hospital and undergo a course of training there with a view of becoming a professional nurse."

"So," Dene remarked, "she has just been telling me."

The President looked honestly amazed.

"You have seen her since your arrival then?"

"She left me," Dene said, "as you approached."

There was a short pause.

"And she told you," the President repeated slowly. "She told you herself of her own accord, and to us, her parents, she has never breathed a word."

"I think," Dene explained, "that in a general way she felt sure of sympathy. On the other hand, as regards yourself and the Senora Rimarez, she was equally certain of your disapproval."

The President stiffened visibly. He turned to Dene with a frown upon his face.

"Am I to understand, Senor Dene, that you have encouraged my daughter in this mad scheme? That you could for a moment regard it as a fitting occupation for her?"

"Not altogether," Dene admitted. "I must confess to an entire sympathy with the spirit which made her discontented with her lot here and seek to alter it. Apart from that, I would rather, very much rather, that she did not go to Buenos Ayres."

The President unbent a little.

"I am glad to hear you say that," he declared heartily. "I have spoken to you upon this matter because you are the only person I know who seems to possess the smallest amount of influence over my daughter. I must confess that my ideas as to the bringing up and the province of young women are of the old world. I believe that in European countries, in England especially, there are new opinions in vogue, in which you, I have no doubt, are in sympathy. I might perhaps be inclined to modify my own views if I were convinced that it was for my daughter's happiness, but I could not for one moment tolerate the thought of Lucia's having anything to do with this Buenos Ayres scheme. She has been very carefully and very delicately brought up. All her instincts are refined to a fault. The routine work of a hospital would be hideous to think of in connection with her. She has not even the physical strength for it. She would be disappointed and her health would suffer. I beg of you, Senor Dene, to talk with her, to endeavour to dissuade her of her own accord from such madness."

"I had intended doing so—on my own account," Dene answered slowly. "In fact, if you will give me your permission, President, I want her to be my wife."

The President's affectation of complete surprise was admirable. His joy and relief were discreetly concealed.

"You have taken my breath away, Senor Dene," he declared. "I may say at once, however, and without hesitation—yes. There is no man whom I would so soon have for a son-in-law. But about Lucia. She is not like other girls, and she has already refused peremptorily the two best matches in San Martina."

"My proposal is of course only subject to her consent," Dene said. "I shall ask her to-night."

"She likes you," the President remarked thoughtfully. "I am sure of that."

"I hope so," Dene answered. "I believe that I can make her happy."

"With regard," the President began, clearing his throat, "to her dowry. I regret very much that——"

"Please do not mention it," Dene interrupted. "I have the fortune, or misfortune, to be a very rich man. I do not require any money with Lucia at all. In fact it would be an embarrassment to me."

The President concealed his feelings by lighting another cigar. What a son-in-law!

"Dene," he said, "if Lucia accepts you, you should take some interest in San Martina. If you have money to spare, I believe that the development of this place would pay you."

"I have thought of it," Dene admitted. "There are

several schemes in my mind which I should like to talk over with you."

The President sighed.

"For myself," he said, "I am getting an old man, and I am looking for rest. The government of this State, without finances, without credit, and in hourly fear of assassination, has aged me terribly. I admit frankly, Senor Dene, that I have made mistakes, but I have had fearful difficulties to contend with. My tenure of office now is nearly at an end, but I see better times in store for San Martina."

"You want schools," Dene said, "a thoroughly representative assembly, a strong police force, hospitals, and a revised code of laws."

"Just so," the President murmured. "Let us go and see my wife. This news will delight her."

"There must be no constraint put upon Lucia," Dene said, rising.

"Accept my word, Senor," the President said, "that there shall be none. In fact, you yourself shall be the first to mention the matter to her. Come with me into the house."

They found the Senora resting in a quiet corner of the piazza. All the morning she had been busy superintending a small army of servants. The President laid his hand upon Dene's shoulder.

"Julie," he said, "after all, I think that Lucia's future need trouble us no longer. Senor Dene has just asked me for her."

The Senora wiped her eyes. Then she held out both her hands.

"Lucia is very fortunate," she said, and you also, Senor. You will be happy. Yes—I know it."

"If Lucia will have me," Dene answered, "I, too, am sure of it."

CHAPTER XLIII

DENE'S LOVEMAKING

IT is certain that San Martina had never before witnessed anything so brilliant as that memorable fête. The suite of reception and official rooms, which covered the whole of the ground-floor of the Presidency, were packed with men and women of all kinds and degrees, dressed for the most part in strange and picturesque garb, and all bent upon enjoyment. The means were ready enough at hand. The great ball-room could accommodate them all, and when they were weary of dancing there were the gardens, where another band was playing, which seemed to have been converted for the night into a European *al fresco* café. Coloured lanterns hung down in the breathless air like yellow moons; from every little table and every shaded walk came the sound of gay voices and the musical laughter of women. San Martina had suddenly become a paradise, even to the discontented. Even those men who had hailed Sagasta as a deliverer and who only a few days ago had been under arms against the public, were there, drinking the President's

health, waltzing over the smooth floors, and smoking cigarettes in the garden between the dances.

On a raised dais at the end of the ball-room was the Presidential party. The President was there, plainly dressed in evening clothes, and with his only decoration, the blue sash which was the badge of his office. The Senora was very handsome in black satin and many diamonds. Dene wore the uniform of a captain in the yeomanry of his country. Close to him, although as yet he had scarcely exchanged a word with her, was Lucia, a little pale, but looking more beautiful than ever in a simple white gown and without a single jewel. Each guest, as he or she arrived, presented themselves before the dais and was greeted by the President according to their standing, with either a handshake or a bow. Every one of importance the President made a point of introducing to Dene, and for an hour or more the rush of arrivals was so great that they were waiting three or four deep. When at last there was a pause, Dene leant over and spoke to Lucia.

"You must be tired," he said. "Come into the fresh air and get cool. I think we have earned a few minutes rest."

She hesitated. There was a curious nervousness about the way she leant over the fastening of her bracelet. She had the appearance of desiring to refuse, but Dene drew her hand through his arm, and led her away.

As they crossed the room she looked up at him suddenly.

"I should like," she said, "to be quiet for a moment

and to say goodbye to you. But if I come, will you promise—you offended me this morning——”

“I will promise anything,” he declared, looking down at her.

She glanced at him doubtfully, saw that he was smiling and suddenly withdrew her hand.

“I will not come,” she said. “You treat me like a child. Do not follow me.”

She glided away, but the crush was too great. Dene caught her in the corridor. She turned upon him with scarlet cheeks and brightly flashing eyes, but he anticipated her anger.

“Lucia,” he said softly, “I will promise—seriously not to offend you. I did not mean to this morning, but you ran away so quickly that I had no time to tell you——”

“To tell me what?” she cried fiercely.

He drew her a single step further out on to the balcony.

“To tell you that I loved you, Lucia. To ask you to be my wife,” he said. “I do not want you to go to Buenos Ayres. I want you to stay here with me—will you?”

She was trembling from head to foot. Her great eyes were slowly raised and fixed steadfastly upon his.

“Why do you ask me?” she whispered. “Is it because you are—sorry for me?”

He glanced around. It was a risk, but they were in a retired corner. He took her into his arms and kissed her.

“It is because I love you, Lucia,” he said.

* * * * *

When they re-entered the ball-room Lucia's face was no

longer pale nor her eyes dim. She was perfectly and radiantly happy. She moved as one walking upon air, and as she passed across the room there was a little murmur of admiration. Dene led her up on to the dais and turned at once to the President and his wife.

"Lucia has made me very happy," he said. "She has promised to be my wife.

There was a new and a strange nervousness in the President's face and the Senora's manner as they greeted Lucia. Her mother kissed her fondly. Her father held both her hands and looked for long into her face. Then he sighed, but it was a sigh of content.

"This is a great happiness to us both," he said simply. "We shall always think of to-night. Be very good to her, Senor Dene. Some day she may need it."

Then he turned to the friends who were gathered around them.

"Permit me, ladies and gentlemen," he said, "to announce to you the betrothal of my daughter, Lucia, to Senor Gregory Dene."

A flow of congratulations followed. Champagne was sent for. The news spread. From the floor of the ball-room and from outside came the sound of cheering, and a great cry for wine. The people trooped from the gardens to the room, and raised their glasses over their heads.

"Good health to the Senor Dene!" they cried. "Good health to the Senorita! Long life and happiness!"

Lucia turned, and with blushing face curtsied to the eager, good-humoured crowd. Dene raised his glass with theirs and bowed his thanks. The bandmaster had a sudden

inspiration. He waved his baton, and amidst loud cheering they played "God save the Queen."

And outside, from table to table, from group to group, passed a tall man in dark clothes and a closely fitting domino, rebuking, entreating, expostulating. It was Dom Pedro, who had waited in vain upon the mountains for the men whom Sagasta had told him were coming, and who had stolen into San Martina to find them here perfectly happy and contented—to all appearance model citizens. They pushed him on one side impatiently. He might be Sagasta's agent or successor, or whatever he chose to call himself, but to-night they wanted none of him. To-night they wanted no politics, nor any fighting. It was a night, this, for enjoyment, for love-making, for the dance. Let Dom Pedro be sensible and enjoy himself also. Sagasta was ill. Well, there was no hurry. They must wait for his recovery. Such a chance as this for pleasure came rarely in a man's way. To-morrow they would see, but at present not a word would they listen to from him. As to a rising now at once—bah, it was child's talk! Dom Pedro found himself repulsed on all hands.

He stood apart for a while, consumed with anger. Then the first little murmur of applause from the ball-room reached him; the sensation of the news was spreading. He pushed forward with the others to hear what it might be. He saw Dene and Lucia together upon the platform, and the truth flashed in upon him. Dene was going to ally himself with this hateful brood, these cursed Rimarez! Under his mask he was as pale as death.

A perfect demon of fury seized him. With it all he remained calm. The figures on the platform were like figures in a dream; only himself he was sure of. He thrust his hand into his pocket and his fingers closed upon the butt of a revolver. Then a cold pang of disappointment chilled him. He had forgotten his cartridges—only one chamber of his revolver was loaded. He looked towards the platform and hesitated. For whom should he use that one? For Dene, who had had it in his power to sweep away this corrupt government, and had preferred to ally himself with them? For the President, the father of the man who had robbed him of the girl he loved many years ago, and who was also the type of all he detested in life? At that moment Lucia looked up at her father and smiled. An evil thought crept through Dom Pedro's distorted brain. Through Lucia he could strike them both. It should be Lucia whom he would kill.

He elbowed his way to the front of the platform, and stood there for a moment waiting for a favourable opportunity. It came very soon. He took a deliberate aim and fired. There was a loud report, a blinding flame and Lucia, with a little moan, sank into Dene's arms. On the front of her white corsage was a single spot of blood, but she looked up at him and smiled as he held her.

They went for Dom Pedro like a pack of wild animals, but he was fleet of foot and he had a start. He tore down the path towards the river, fifty people in pursuit. Some one found a revolver and covered him carefully. Then there was a flash, a report, a cry, but he ran on. On the

river's brink he had a moment's respite. He looked first into the dark waters and then up to the brilliant sky. Then he plunged in, and the waters closed above his head. There was a gurgling in his ears, and the cries of his pursuers seemed to die away—to belong, indeed, to another world. When they reached the river bank there were a few ripples upon the water, but no signs of Dom Pedro. They stood about for a while wondering eagerly whether escape was possible. Months afterwards they knew that he had gone at once to the bottom with a bullet in his lung.

* * * * *

They laid Lucia upon a couch, but in a moment she opened her eyes and smiled.

"No one need be anxious about me," she said, with her eyes seeking Dene's. "I am quite sure that I am not hurt. The bullet only grazed my shoulder."

Dene, who had a pocket-knife in his hand, deftly cut open the strap of her gown and gave a great sigh of relief.

"It is true," he said. "There is only a slight scratch."

The news spread. Lucia, who was now sitting up, called to her father and whispered in his ear. He nodded, and stepped forward in front of the daïs.

"My friends," he said, amidst a breathless silence, "I am thankful to tell you that my daughter is unhurt. It is her particular wish that these festivities should not be interrupted. She will join us again as soon as she has changed her gown."

The room was rent with cheering. The men, who had been watching the river where Dom Pedro had disappeared

heard it and returned. The news of his end was passed around with fierce joy. Then the wonderfully mercurial temperament of this people came to their aid. They rose in their places and cheered frantically as Lucia passed out upon her father's arm. Then they took up the thread of the evening's festivities exactly where it had been so rudely broken in upon. It is probable that never before in the history of the Republic had a President been so popular as President Ramirez was that night.

CHAPTER XLIV

A DRAMATIC ELOPEMENT

IT seemed to Dene that he had been sleeping only a few minutes when he was awakened by a great shouting in the Square below, and much commotion within the walls of the Presidency itself. He leaped out of bed and slipped on some clothing, peering the while out of the window. The Square was full of people, all of whom were crowding round large white placards with which every wall seemed to be hung. Some were still in their fancy dress of the night before; others were half dressed, as he was. Every one was very busy gesticulating and talking. Then there came the sound of voices closer at hand, and a knock at his own door. Dene threw it open. Signor Mopez and half a dozen of the principal inhabitants of the place were there.

"What is it?" Dene cried. "A revolution?"

Mopez thrust one of the placards into his hands.

"Read, Senor," he said. "It is most marvellous. The whole city is wild with excitement."

Dene took the placard and read it. It was headed :

"To the inhabitants of San Martina.

"MY DEAR FRIENDS,—Last night there was a single word which I omitted to say to you on behalf of the Senora, my

wife, and myself. It was farewell. I have been your President now for five years, during which time you will permit me to remind you that I have subdued eleven revolutions, and my assassination has been attempted nine times. I have had to maintain an army without resources, and to carry on the public works without means or credit. Do you wonder that I have found it an arduous task? Do you wonder that I say to myself and you, I am growing old, let another bear the burden? Three times I have tried to abdicate; each time you have prevented me. Hence this present and somewhat unceremonious leavetaking. By the time you read this I shall be far away. This time my abdication is a thing accomplished. I go to spend my remaining years in the country of my birth, from which I can assure you I shall always take a sincere interest in the politics and progress of San Martina.

"One last word of advice to you. You will look amongst yourselves for my successor. There is but one man who can make of San Martina a prosperous and a happy country. That man is Gregory Dene, of Beau Desir. He is an Englishman, and he can be trusted. He is English, and you would therefore make yourself secure against any affront from any nation in the world. Elect him your President, and you may yet become a tranquil and a prosperous State.

"Once more, my friends, accept the good wishes and the farewell of

"GUSTAVE RIMAREZ."

Dene read the placard through to the end, and looked into the faces of the men who crowded respectfully around him.

"Do you mean to say that he has gone?" Dene gasped out.

Mopez drew him to the window. Far out at sea was the black trail of a departing steamer.

"He is gone," Mopez said, "and the Senora, his wife, with him. It is veritably true."

Dene's sense of humour was suddenly irresistibly aroused. He sat on the edge of his bed and laughed till the tears stood in his eyes. They all stared at him in wonderment.

"Well, gentlemen," he said at last, "I need scarcely tell you that President Rimarez' kind idea has never so much as been hinted to me. It is quite impossible that I should entertain it for a moment."

The faces of all of them dropped visibly.

"There is no one else," Mopez said, "to whom the people would even listen. If you refuse, in an hour there will be a riot. We who have property will lose it. Worse things even than that may happen. San Martina will be a ruined country."

"Why not yourself, Mopez?" Dene asked.

"I am not man enough for them," was the simple answer. "I am a coward, and the sight of firearms makes me tremble. The people would jeer at me."

"The General," Dene suggested.

"He would be the nominee of the army. The civilians would oppose him tooth and nail."

"Senor Mallito, then."

"He would be a civilian, and the army would never accept him."

Dene was thoughtful for a moment.

"Where is the Signorina Lucia?" he asked.

"In her room. She has been inquiring for you. She, too, was utterly unprepared."

"I will consult with her," Dene said, "and give you my answer in an hour."

* * * * *

In less than the time which he had stated, Dene stood on the balcony of the Presidency, with Lucia by his side. The Place below was packed with people. Every man in San Martina was there. Dene's appearance was the signal for a burst of cheering which lasted for several minutes. Then he lifted his hand, and there followed a breathless silence.

"My friends," he said. "I should like first to tell you that the departure of your President and the contents of that placard, which I see you have all been reading, came to me wholly and altogether as a surprise. This time yesterday I had as little idea of being asked to become your President as any of you. I want you to know that first of all."

A little murmur of assent filled the air. They were quite willing to believe that the Englishman had known nothing of an event which had come upon them as such a tremendous surprise. Then they waited anxiously for him to go on.

"I want you also to understand," Dene continued, with some hesitancy, "that I have had no experience at this sort of thing, and I cannot quite see why you should consider me competent to assume such a position. However, that is your responsibility. If you are willing to have

me for President, I accept the office—listen—on certain conditions.”

There was a storm of applause, and the waving of many handkerchiefs, but Dene held out his hand for silence.

“I have said, on certain conditions. Let me tell you at once that Signor Mopez, and those who have come to me on your behalf, find those conditions so serious that they have not dared to accept them. They have left the decision to you yourselves. I very much prefer that it should be so. You and I can make our bargain like honest men, face to face, and if my terms do not suit you, you have only to say so, and the matter is at an end.

“Now, men of San Martina, here is plain-speaking for you. You are a bankrupt State. Your Treasury is empty and your credit has gone. Do you know what has become of the money? Some of it, no doubt, has been wasted by mal-administration; the bulk of it has gone in the maintenance of an unnecessary and burdensome luxury. I mean your army.”

For the first time there was dissension in the crowd below. There were murmurs of perplexity, a few angry cries. But when Dene held up his hand they were quite ready to let him continue.

“Now, ask yourselves,” he continued, “what practical use has your army been to you? You may say that it has kept you safe from foreign invasion. Very well. I am an Englishman, and I promise you the protection of my country against any unprovoked attack upon you by any nation in the world. Then you say for the suppression of revolutions. But if I am your President, I am going to

arrange matters so that there are no revolutions. Very well, then. Of what use is your army? None at all. Now I will tell you what I propose. First of all, the disbandment of your army. There is work for every man on the soil and in the quarries here, and the additional labour you will gain will be a great boon. Secondly, the establishment of a court of justice, with a revised and reasonable code of laws. Thirdly, the enrolment of a strong police force. Fourthly, the imposing of a fine for the carrying of loaded firearms anywhere near the city. Fifthly, the readjustment of your House of Assembly on the lines of every man one vote. These are the chief things on which I must insist. If you accept—listen to what I offer you. I am fortunately a rich man, and I am willing to make a loan to the Treasury sufficient to wipe out the deficit, and meet all bonds now current. I will also advance the money to build a hospital, a townhall, and other needed buildings. I will inaugurate a system of volunteering which shall, I promise you, in the course of a few years produce an army fully equal to the one which you are now disbanding. There is the bargain, my friends. Accept or decline it at your will. I want to make a contented and prosperous people of you, and if you trust me I will do it. What do you say?"

A storm of applause rose from the crowd as from one great throat. There was scarcely a single dissident, scarcely a man who did not see the saviour of his country in the young Englishman who stood on the balcony above them. Dene held out his hand to Lucia, and drew her forward.

"I thank you very much," he said simply, during a

momentary hush. "I think you will find that all I have promised I will perform, and that brighter days are in store for San Martina."

* * * * *

It was many months before Dene and his wife could even pay a flying visit to Beau Desir, but at last, one evening, they rode together through the Pass, and looked down upon the prosperous little settlement decked out now with flags and flowers. Behind them all was well. San Martina had entered upon a marvellous epoch of prosperity, and the young President and his wife were almost worshipped. Already her trade had increased threefold. The harbour was thronged now with merchant vessels flying the flag of every nation in the world. The whole place had been rebuilt. Handsome public buildings were fast being erected; lawlessness and rioting were things of the past. It was a metamorphosis which, to the older residents, seemed almost like a miracle.

This was Dene's first holiday, and all Beau Desir was astir with excitement and joy. Angus and Eugène Rimarez came galloping up the slope on their little ponies. From below, the children's clear voices singing a hymn of welcome came floating up through the still, sweet air. They drew rein, and waited for a moment.

"Beau Desir is as beautiful as ever," Lucia murmured. "I almost wish that we could live here always."

Dene smiled.

"At least," he said, "we will never have any other summer home. Do you see how well Eugène looks? Angus tells me that he is making the horse ranche a great

success. In a year or two it will be one of the largest in South America."

"Ternissa," she said, "has transformed him."

"Ternissa," he answered, smiling, "is a very wonderful woman."



An elderly lady and gentleman, well preserved and of prosperous appearance, were lounging in comfortable wicker chairs on the terrace of the Hôtel Leon d'Or, Monte Carlo, the lady knitting, her husband reading an English newspaper. Suddenly he uttered a little exclamation.

"Julie, listen."

She laid down her work. He began to read aloud the paragraph which had attracted his attention.

"Amongst those who have been honoured with special invitations to this country in connection with the forthcoming celebrations are Sir Gregory and Lady Dene of San Martina, South America. Sir Gregory, who has only recently succeeded to the title, left England many years ago to settle in San Martina, of which country he was elected President the year before last. He has succeeded in the difficult task of reconciling South American apathy with English commercial genius, and since his accession to power San Martina, although one of the smallest, has become one of the richest and most progressive States of South America. Lady Dene, who was the daughter of his predecessor, will easily take a leading place amongst the beauties of the forthcoming season."

The Senora beamed with pleasure and excitement.

"The dear child!" she murmured. "To think that we shall see her so soon!"

The ex-President laid down the paper and lit a black cigar.

"A cynic," he remarked drily, "would say that I never served my country so well as in the leaving it."

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